

**A Foucaultian Analysis of Power Relations in Child Protection Case Work with
Youth and Families**

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Child and Youth Studies

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts – Child and Youth Studies

Faculty of Child and Youth Studies, Brock University

St. Catharines, Ontario

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Abstract

This thesis takes some steps in examining the child protection system from a position that is rarely discussed. Specifically, I explore how Foucault's concept of disciplinary power can be used to demonstrate how power operates within the client/worker relationship. This relationship is shown to be quite complex with power flowing bidirectionally, rather than hierarchically. Instead of viewing power imbalances as a function of state control, I show how the client/worker relationship is constituted by the worker, the client, the organization and the social body. A postmodern autoethnography is used to document my journey as I expose the disciplinary practices and instruments that I was subject to and used with my clients.

Given that the child protection system is constantly shifting and changing in order to improve its ability to safeguard children a greater emphasis is required to examine how workers operate within this complex, overwhelming and multi-dimensional world. This thesis has shown that by engaging in a reflexive examination of my position of power different approaches to making intervention beneficial to all involved become available. This is important if child protection work aims to work *with* clients rather than *on* clients.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank Dr. Hans Skott-Myhre for his guidance and support. Thanks for believing in me and not allowing me to give up. I would also like to thank Dr. Rebecca Raby and Dr. Dorothy Griffiths for their suggestions for improvements of this thesis. This work would not have been possible without the generous support from the management and staff at the Children's Aid Society (not named in order to protect the participants identity) and the youth participants. A special thank you goes out to my family and friends, especially Susan. Your words of encouragement and acts of kindness helped me through this most challenging time in my life. Like you all said, it was worth it in the end!

“Good practitioners are uncomfortable about so much of the child protection agenda. But the bandwagon rolls on and the procedures manual gets fatter and fatter. And the good practitioners leave in their droves, frustrated, burnt out, but often without the language or the conceptual knowledge to challenge the very premise upon which the whole ‘child protection’ edifice is built” (Smith, 2004, 2).

After six years of employment at a child protection agency I was one of those workers who left frustrated with the system. One of my main complaints was that I could not reconcile the philosophical and ideological differences between the way that I thought families, children and youth should be provided service and the service they actually received. On top of that, I was frustrated being ‘a cog in the wheel’, with me being one of those who provided insufficient service. I was tired of seeing the ‘failures’ (moving children from placement to placement, youth running away or being arrested) as my fault and tired of criticizing myself for not having done more to ‘help’.

In stepping away from the system and looking back at my experience I wanted a conceptual tool that would assist me in putting the complaints I had in some context. I was aware that I was not alone in my frustration with the system. For years, the child welfare system has been under criticism from radical, socialist, Marxist and feminist social workers regarding the way problems are identified and treated (de Montigny, 1995a). Even my fellow colleagues said numerous times that the system ‘may be broken but it is the only one we’ve got’. It set me wondering what it is about the child protection system that creates such criticism and frustration.

There is little argument that the child protection system is under a great deal of pressure to keep children and youth safe from abuse. With limited financial resources

and increased calls to investigate, workers in the child protection system are faced with a tremendously difficult job. It is not surprising then that staff turnover is often high within child protection agencies (Kammerman & Kahn, 1989). Research studies have identified the factors that contribute to staff turnover and burnout (see Fletcher, 1982; Fryer, Miyoshi & Thomas, 1989; Figley, 1995; Baumann, Kern, McFadden, & Law, 1997). It is important to note that there is a distinction made between turnover and burnout because some workers who are dissatisfied remain on the job (Rycraft, 1994). Within the literature, burnout is defined as “a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization of clients, and feelings of reduced personal accomplishment” (Anderson, 2000). Maslach and Jackson (1986) use a similar definition as the basis for the development of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), which has become the most widely used instrument for measuring burnout (Stalker & Harvey, 2002). Anderson (2000) reports that the following factors contribute to staff turnover and burnout: personal stressors experienced by the worker, such as trying to balance the demands of their own family’s needs with the demands of the job; job requirements, such as dealing with the risk that a child on their caseload may get injured or neglected; and the work environment, such as dealing with a high number of cases and limited agency support.

Flowers & Hughes (1973) suggest that understanding why workers remain in the job is equally, if not more important, than exploring why workers have left. I would suggest that greater emphasis within research is needed to examine how workers deal with the frustrations of the job. This is important because how workers view the agency and their own role has an impact on the quality of service they provide. For example,

Maslach (1982) reports that if workers are frustrated they are unable to relate warmly or consistently to clients' needs.

The most significant piece of research I found that described the struggles of doing child protection work was De Montigny's (1995a) book *Social Working: An Ethnography of Front-Line Practice*. Using Dorothy Smith's work, he examines people's lived worlds in a way that addresses socially organized practice, lived activities, and actual forms of work. Though de Montigny does a really good job of describing how child protection workers are pressured to maintain discursive practices, such as writing documents that attempt to put coherence and order to chaotic and complex family situations, he does not spend much time addressing how and why both workers and clients resist these practices. Another critique of de Montigny's work is that there is little discussion on how he was impacted by the day-to-day interactions he had with his clients. Shulman (1985) states that this is important to consider as, "any attempt to understand practice would need to focus on the dynamic interaction between worker and client, each affecting and being affected by the other" (p.276). He points out that "this complicated interaction" between worker and client does not occur in a "vacuum", but rather is situated within an agency setting and influenced by a number of factors. Shulman cites examples such as worker caseload, supervision and agency practices as having a powerful impact on the interactions between workers and clients. I would concur with Shulman that these factors play a role in shaping interactions between workers and clients. However, I would also add to this list the relationship of power.

Authority and Power

There is very little research that addresses how child protection workers handle the power that is assigned to them due to their position. One of the studies I found addresses the issue of power by distinguishing it as different from the concept of authority. Palmer (1983) argues that authority derives from power, but the two are not synonymous. Palmer uses McIver's definition of power, which is the capacity to control the behaviour of others, and authority, which is "the established right to make decisions on pertinent issues", to suggest that authority requires the consent of the 'other' in order for a helping relationship to be established (p.120). Palmer suggests that social workers must learn to use authority if they are to be effective and should encourage their clients to grant them authority. What Palmer fails to incorporate into this discussion is how "the established right" of social workers to have authority has been socially constructed and used so that the population can be regulated, managed and controlled. So even though Palmer suggests that clients have the ability to choose whether or not they grant authority, it is not acknowledged that this choice has limits. For example, social workers are the 'gatekeepers' to accessing resources (therapy, welfare allowances) or in the case of child protection, determine whether or not a family will be subject to certain types of intervention (apprehension of child). Palmer does not address what the implications are for clients who refuse to grant authority. Also Palmer does not address what it feels like for social workers to have to make decisions *on* clients versus *with* clients. What impact does this have on the worker? Does it impact on the workers' view of their jobs and their views on authority and in turn how they conduct their work with clients?

Power and the Child Welfare System

When I explained to people that I was examining issues of power in the child welfare system, I heard time and time again a response like “Oh, you mean how the Children’s Aid Society has the power and the clients don’t”. At first, these comments were frustrating to me but I realized that there appears to be a general opinion about child welfare that the agency has all the power and the clients are dominated by a powerful, all-encompassing system. Research studies have reported that parents experienced the child protection system as ‘oppressive’ (Wilford & Hetherington, 1997), or as the ‘enemy’ (Callahan, Lumb & Wharf, 1994). However, having been a worker within the system I came away with a different view of how power was exercised. In my view, the power relationship between the worker, the agency and the client was much more complicated, complex and interrelated. Here, Foucault’s writings on power provided a theoretical framework to think about the child welfare system in a different way.

Foucault and Power

“Power,” Foucault wrote, “is everywhere” (1978, 93). Foucault stresses that power should be understood as relational, in that it occurs *between* individuals and groups. This is in contrast to theories that view certain individuals and groups as having power – such as the ruling political party or police officers – while others do not. Foucault (1980) provides a framework of how to examine power relationships, which I follow for this project. First, Foucault stresses that notions of ‘truth’ should be questioned. Rather than accepting dominant knowledge or discourses about concepts such as ‘youth’, ‘family’ and ‘child protection’, Foucault emphasized that they be examined as historical constructs (Foucault, 1994). Second, we need to examine how the

process of subjectification is inscribed upon individuals as well as how individuals take part in, use and resist their subjectivity. By engaging in this process, new forms of knowledge about 'youth', 'family' and 'child protection' become available. Therefore this thesis is an examination into the power relationships that I was subjected to, constituted by and reproduced as a worker in the child protection system.

Postmodern Autoethnography

Postmodernists have made a significant contribution to the field of social work and have identified the important implications that privileged knowledge has had on work with clients. Postmodernism is defined as "a linguistic theory that proposes that the social world cannot be treated as an objective system" (Pardeck, Murphy & Min Choi, 1994). Rather than treating knowledge as fixed and linear, postmodernists argue that knowledge is socially constructed. Postmodernists have found that some kinds of knowledge are given more power than others based on an individual's participation in social discourse. The implication of these privileged discourses is that those with less power have their worlds defined for them and are denied the opportunity to describe their experiences in a way that is most meaningful for them. For example, within the discourse of empiricism, it is more acceptable for researchers to study and analyze other people's lives rather than make themselves the topic of investigation. A postmodern autoethnographical approach challenges this view and allows exploration of a topic from various viewpoints.

An autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). This style of research acknowledges that research questions often arise from personal

struggles and/or experiences. By examining an issue that is a site of struggle, researchers can learn not only about the topic from a societal and/or cultural perspective but also learn more about themselves. At the same time, by bringing forth my voice as a female social worker operating in a patriarchal society, it allows me to reclaim the power of self-knowledge. Said differently, using an autoethnographic approach allows to me assert that I have something important to say and that my experiences are valid.

One of the ways that I explored power relationships was through conducting interviews with youth whose families had an open file with a Children's Aid Society. In order to address issues related to ethical research practice I sought out families with whom I had no previous contact or relationship. By listening to their experiences and reflecting on my thoughts and actions during the interviews, I began to unpack how both the youth and I took up, used and resisted the system. As well, I came to see how there were opportunities to engage in this relationship in different ways. This type of exploration into experience allows for the inclusion of other people's stories but also allows me, as the investigator, the opportunity to include my story. This is important, as Ellis and Bochner (2000) point out, if we want to create transformation, in any form, we must start with ourselves.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the development of perceptions about youth, families and the child protection system within a historical framework. By tracing the changes in these concepts we can begin to understand how current perceptions have become embedded in Western culture. There are two benefits to engaging in this process. First, by peeling away the layers of 'fact' associated with youth, families and child

protection we can see that they are social constructions developed from the middle and upper class concerns about the state. Second, this process will determine that perceptions of youth, families and child protection have not remained stagnant, being subject to changing societal, political and economical environments.

The first part of the chapter will be divided into the following sections:

1) the creation of adolescence, which discusses how the period of adolescence became constructed as a distinct stage, controlled and supervised by various rules and institutions; 2) the creation of the family as an institution, which gives an overview of how families have been designated as the primary agent for looking after adolescents with each member prescribed particular roles; and 3) the creation of the child protection system, whereby social workers were designated as the ‘experts’ to infiltrate family life and promote the expectations of appropriate parenting. The second part of this chapter consists of the theoretical underpinnings that are guiding this research. Foucault’s notion of governmentality and power relations will be explored with an emphasis on how these two concepts facilitate a critical analysis of my role as a social worker within a child protection system.

Creation of Adolescence

It needs to be acknowledged that outlining the history of youth is a complex task, since these experiences are shaped by numerous factors such as context, location, gender, class and religion. As well, while conducting this review I found that the terms children, childhood, youth, adolescence and teenager were often used interchangeably. However, what these terms had in common was their distinction as separate from adult or adulthood. As Calvert (1998) suggests, it is important to look at why adolescence

became so important, especially from the early 20th century onwards, for what purpose and what have been the advantages and disadvantages.

Youth.

There has been a lengthy debate about the beginnings of childhood, youth and adolescence. Much of this debate has stemmed from the ambiguity that has existed around the transition from childhood to adulthood. Some have argued that in medieval times there was no distinction made between adults and children (Aries, 1962), in that they were in institutions together, “subject to the same disciplinary and supportive societal forces” (Tait, 2000). Ackland (1995) states that prior to the modern period, the transition between childhood and adulthood was relatively quick and unremarkable.

He states:

“The in-between stage of youth did not always exist as it does today. Phillipe Aries (1962) has shown that in Medieval Europe, the movement from child to adult was instantaneous. ‘Once he had passed the age of five or seven, the child was immediately absorbed into the world of adults: this concept of a brief childhood lasted for a long time in the lower classes’ (p.329). In the seventeenth century, ‘by the age of ten, girls were already little women: a precocity due in part to an upbringing which taught girls to behave very early in life like grown-ups’ (p.332). (Ackland, 1995, p.26).

In contrast, Ross Beales (1992), for example, cites convincing evidence that Puritans in seventeenth century New England were well aware of developmental differences between infants, youth and adults.

Within the literature, there appears to be a fair bit of cross over between the beginnings of childhood and adolescence. Koops (1992) indicates that the story of adolescence is the same as the one concerning childhood. It is not uncommon to find historians who refer to childhood but address this age group up and through what we now refer to as the teenage years. The approach that I have taken is to suggest that at first there was a distinction made between children and adults and then a lengthening of the ages of childhood occurred. In order to explore how modern adolescence became defined as a period separate from adulthood, I first examine how childhood became separated. I then explore how the lengthening of childhood developed as the use of institutions (e.g. schools) responded to concerns about youth behaviour, especially working-class youth.

Several theorists have agreed that from the eighteenth century onward, the conceptualization of childhood, which was encapsulated in the middle-class or bourgeois family model as a period of dependency requiring moral and physical care within a family, informed child-rearing practices and reform initiatives (see Foucault, 1980; Donzelot, 1980; Rooke and Schnell, 1983). Campaigns were implemented to prevent children from working and focused on getting them in to systematic sex-specific schooling and monitoring their leisure activities (Fitz, 1981). However, by the late nineteenth century, though many middle-class children experienced childhood as a period of dependency, most working-class children did not. Despite the laws that had been put in place to regulate children's participation in work (e.g. Factory Acts), many children continued to labour in the unregulated areas of agriculture, domestic service, mining and retail shops (Chunn, 2003). Attendance at school was still under parental discretion and the leisure time of working-class children was predominately free from adult supervision.

Specifically in North America, it was during the late-nineteenth century that provincial statutes and municipal by-laws were enacted and extended to prohibit child labour altogether in factories, mines, shops and street trades (Houston, 1982). At the same time, compulsory attendance laws enforced that all children were required to participate in school up to a certain age and parents were subject to sanctions if they did not comply (Sutherland, 1976). Leisure activities of children and youth, particularly among the working classes, were also regulated. Vagrancy acts and curfews are just a few examples of how children and youth were monitored. The behaviour of girls, especially in relation to sexuality, was specifically targeted from the 1880s onward. Laws were enacted that both protected and controlled girls' behaviour. For example, in the 1892 Criminal Code a number of wide-ranging categories of offences were added to protect girls from "male sexual predators" (Snell, 1983, p.118). At the same time, laws were also put into place that made abortion and birth control illegal (McLaren, 1978).

Earlier I stated that once the distinction was made between children and adults, the period of childhood was systematically extended. This is very evident when you consider children and youths participation in school. In 1920, 28 percent of American youths between the ages of fourteen and seventeen were in high school; by 1930, 47 percent of this age group was attending high school (Spring, 1994). In the following section, I examine how the period of adolescence was lengthened in response to concerns raised by the psychological movement, as well as economic shifts and the creation of the welfare state.

Adolescence.

The burgeoning distinction between adolescence and adulthood became widespread during the early twentieth century and efforts were made to “universalize and to democratize the concept of adolescence” (Kett, 1977, p.215). The field of psychology played a significant role in distinguishing the characteristics and behaviours of this age group. The concern that adolescents were not in a position to make mature decisions was partly based on G. Stanley Hall’s series of books. Hall (1916) viewed adolescence as “torn by dualisms which disrupted the harmony of childhood; hyperactivity and inertia, social sensibility and self-absorption, lofty intuitions and childish folly”. In short, Hall professed that children and youth were not “ready for life, and that [he] had to be subjected to special treatment, a sort of quarantine, before he was allowed to join the adults” (p.412).

However, not all of Hall’s writings were supported by theorists of various persuasions who followed him (Adams, 1997). Whereas Hall (1916) suggested that adolescents should be “allowed free play, a full draining out or catharsis” (p.411) and that adolescent faults should be viewed as instinctive urges and not placed under repression, the emphasis on controlling young people increased. Why was this ignored? One way to explore this is to examine the social context. Some sociologists and historians have argued that constructions of adolescence can be matched to parallel economic shifts. Enright and colleagues (1987) argue that in times of economic depression, theories that depicted adolescence as a period of immaturity requiring a prolonged period of separation from adult roles dominated. However, in wartime and during labour shortages, theories

arose emphasizing the abilities and psychological competence of adolescents that negated the need for preparation.

Another way to examine how constructions of adolescence were developed is to consider the creation of the welfare state. The welfare state was concerned with the individual and social welfare of its citizens. Public institutions that managed children's lives, developmentally and educationally, and the emphasis on children's "best interest" served to change the way young people were treated (Goldson, 1997). Here, Kett's (1977) definition of adolescence as "the period after puberty during which a young person is institutionally segregated from casual contacts with a broad range of adults" reflects more accurately the experiences of young people aged 13 to 20. The types of settings and work that young people were engaged in became of great interest. The increase in factories and technology and the instituting of laws around work environments left many young people without work (Tanner, 2001). This resulted in further concerns as young people who had too much free time were considered to be a risk to society. Tanner (2001) argued that extending the age of attendance at school was a means to retain boys, especially, and keep them off the streets. The introduction and then later the enforcement of schooling for all children regardless of social class and gender, and the lengthening of school attendance to age 16, withdrew their full participation from the family but left them dependent on their families for longer periods of time. This had significant implications for some youth. For much of the 19th century, independence in youth, which was defined as a willingness to strike out on one's own, had been a precondition for success. However, "by 1900 such desires for independence and autonomy were viewed as prescriptions for failure" (Kett, 1977).

Teenager.

With an increased number of adolescents out of the workforce and in the school system, adolescence became a “generation” recognized more by their common experience of age than by the class, racial or ethnicity-based differences that separated them (Knight Abowitz & Rees, 2005). In this process, a youth culture began to form in America that included an increased emphasis on consumerism and the availability of information and recreation through the media (Danesi, 1994, p.3). The symbolism of teenagers became closely connected with goods and services, as magazines, record shops, clothing, new dances, foods, and cars were carefully aimed to appeal to this age group (Palladino, 1996). Over the past fifty years, the success of young people as consumers has intensified the marketing towards this age group, such that, rather than having just a few styles to choose from, young people have a “smorgasbord” of styles that they can move within and between.

Even though youth in the 21st century have more access to information (World Wide Web) and choices, they continue to be bound by historical institutions. The mandatory attendance at school and the social demand of living within a family has not changed much over the past several decades. Rather, I would argue that youths’ choices around where or how to spend their time are increasingly limited by policies and rules put into place by adults. Are the original purposes of these institutions still needed? Some would argue that they are needed more urgently than ever as the demands for young people to achieve a high education and be responsible, personable people is the essence to obtaining a good job and a stable future. However, what about youth who do not agree with the school as a primary means of transition into employment? What about those

youth who are unable to meet the growing requirements of academic expectations? I would argue that some of the previous strategies, specifically apprenticeships, are also needed and that their return could provide an opportunity for young people who may see themselves as having no options. Young people who feel they have no options can often be found in our jails and on our streets (Baron, 2001). Youth who do not comply with societal norms (e.g. schooling and/or working) are often defined as deviant. It is here that I want to examine how the creation of teenage deviancy has been formed and continues to have considerable influence on young people today. With this discussion, we can begin to see how these constructions of youth deviancy have provided the justification for programs and interventions that attempt to control and regulate youth.

Creation of Youth as Deviant

Prior to state intervention, the involvement of religious institutions in young people's lives played a significant role in defining appropriate behaviour. Taken from a document from the seventeenth century, a pastor was reported saying,

“young people - unmarried boys and girls - behave very badly, both at night and during the day, meeting in taverns and other places reserved for the purpose; particularly scandalous and dangerous are visits to the girls, when they go walking in the streets or converse at windows, on Saturday, Sunday and on holidays”.

(Schindler, 1997, p.268).

There are also documents that suggest that,

“The apprentice was represented as a rebellious adolescent who ditched his boss to run about the streets of the big city, blending into its sounds, absorbing its frustration, taking advantages of its resources, living on the fringe of legality, picking pockets,

making hasty getaways, ever ready for riotous assemblies, demonstrations, fighting, or barricades” (Perrot, 1997 p.68 in Levi & Schmitt)

Adult fears, particularly among the middle class, of juvenile delinquency have driven much of the public debate since the late eighteenth century in Westernized nations (Hebidge, 1997). Particularly vulnerable to being viewed as delinquents were working class and poor youth. Kett (1977) suggests that the stereotyping of youth was no accident. He says,

“...adolescence was essentially a conception of behaviour imposed on youth rather than an empirical assessment of the way in which young people actually behaved. ...A biological process of maturation became the basis of social definition of an entire age group” (p.215, 243)

The notion that adolescence was a distinct developmental period can be traced back to the writings of G. Stanley Hall, the psychologist to whom I referred earlier as being the first to bring awareness to this age group. Influenced by the biological evolution of species, Hall argues that humans also passed through a series of stages in development. Hall identifies that adolescence is a time of *sturm und drang* (storm and stress), which he compares to the earlier unstable and tumultuous phase in the development of human civilization (Tanner, 2001, p.30). Hall’s work suggests that there are biological causes for adolescent deviancy, evidenced by mood disruptions, a tendency to challenge parents and their propensity to engage in reckless and antisocial behaviour (Arnett, 1999). Though Hall’s theories have faced substantial criticism from other theorists, especially Mead (1928) who through her anthropological work demonstrated that storm and stress was not universal and biological, it remains “the mainstream view of

the social and health scientists providing commentary to the media and to political authorities” (Males, 1996 p.220).

At the same time, the idea of adolescence as a period of turmoil is often perpetuated within the general public. Arnett (1999) suggests that although there is no indication that most people in the American public see storm and stress as inevitable and universal, there is some support that adolescence is seen as the time of life when it is most likely to involve difficulties such as conflict with parents, risk behaviour, and mood disruptions. To describe this somewhat more clearly, I reflect on my own uses of adolescence as a period of turmoil and conflict. I can recall numerous occasions when I have made statements to parents or caregivers such as, “The teenage years are the hardest to get through”, or “They have so much going on physically, hormonally, no wonder they are angry/moody”. In examining why I made these statements, I can see that it was often to provide some ‘answer’ to why youth were not complying with certain requirements (attending school, curfew). Viewing the period of adolescence as a time of conflict, in some ways, normalized the youth. Said differently, a youth’s behaviour was not viewed as surprising or out of context. Though I used statements from a biological determinism perspective, they were not satisfactory to me. I felt that in many ways it took away from acknowledging the societal context in which Western youth have to live and thrive, e.g. schooling, professionalism. Through this literature review I had the opportunity to explore other perspectives on youth deviancy.

The Sociology of Deviance

In contrast to theorists who look for reasons of deviancy within the individual, such as biological and genetic causes, sociologists look for explanations outside the

individual. Specifically, sociologists examine social relations and how norms become defined and used to categorize behaviours as normal or deviant. There are several theories on deviance, which Schaefer (2001) puts into the following groups: a) the functionalist perspective (strain theory), b) the symbolic interactionist perspective (differential association theory, control theory) and c) the conflict perspective (conflict theory). Sociologists working from an interactionist perspective focus on how people label one another, how they relate to one another on the basis of these labels, and the consequences of these social relations (Rubington and Weinberg, 2002). For example, Bernburg (2003) suggests that youth who are formally labelled as deviant through the court system face exclusionary processes that have long-term negative consequences for life chances, such as educational attainment and employment opportunities.

Political economists and other conflict theorists have done a great job of demonstrating the link between how deviancy is defined and issues of power and inequality. For example, Richard Quinney's (1970) social reality theory of crime argues that political and class power factors are the root explanations of crime. Quinney's central thesis was that the politically powerful created one form of negative deviance – crime – as a means of social control:

“Criminal law is used by the state and the ruling class to secure the survival of the capitalist system, and, as capitalist society is further threatened by its own contradiction, criminal law will be increasingly used in the attempt to maintain domestic order” (1974, p.16).

Palmer and Humphrey (1995) state that while society professes to abhor certain forms of deviant behaviour in fact it contributes to the organization and perpetuation of society. It

ensures that certain institutions are maintained, such as prisons. At the same time, it perpetuates the division between adults and youth. Researchers have found that there is differential treatment within the legal system towards youth, and especially towards minority youth. For example, Males (1996) reports on a 1993 California Department of Corrections study that found youth were consistently confined for 60 percent longer than adults for the same crimes (nearly a year longer). In regards to discrimination based on class, James (1998) found that social class, as well as gender and race, played a significant role in determining whether the police treated youth more harshly. Within the court system, Leiber and Stairs (1999) found differential treatment for African American youth, particularly those charged with drug offenses, compared to White youth. Specifically, African American youth were more likely than White youth to receive a more severe sentence and less likely to be admitted into diversionary options.

Despite the evidence that has shown most crimes are committed by adult males (Statistic Canada), there continues to be public fears about youth delinquency. Tyyska (2001) suggests that in Canada there is a persistent myth about the dramatically increasing youth crime, violence and gang activity. Focusing on young people as deviant removes the possibility of re-examining stereotypes and attitudes towards youth. The displacement of social anxiety onto young people has created them as “a convenient scapegoat group” (Hall & Jefferson, 1976, p.72). Scapegoating young people allows us to avoid admitting that we (meaning society as a whole) have backed young people into a corner, offering few options other than to conform to societal norms or be considered deviant. As Furstenberg (2000) argued,

“to a great degree, the problematic features of adolescence and the transition to

adulthood are structurally created and maintained by social institutions that isolate youth from adults; ironically, this is done to prepare them for future roles". (p. 3).

I think it is important to acknowledge how much of a role institutions, especially those geared towards youth, have played in vilifying youth.

Agency and Industry Self-Interest

Males (1996) reports that a considerable amount of evidence has been amassed that agency and industry self-interest in North America, not the true conditions of teenagers, have driven the "epidemic" of youth problems (p.29). He provides the following examples:

"At the 1986 National Conference on Drug and Alcohol Abuse Prevention, the NIAAA and the National Institute on Drug Abuse painted mid-1980s teen drug abuse at 'epidemic proportions', justifying expanded programming and agency funding"(p.29).

and,

"The American Medical Association and National Association of State Boards of Education...unabashedly doubled the number of teenage unwed births and claimed a widely embellished 30-fold increase in youth crime since 1950" (p.30).

During the 1990s, youth across North America were up to six more times likely to have contact with some sort of private professional organization (e.g. psychiatric wards, drug and alcohol treatment programs, counselling) than in the 1980s. That is a very profitable business. However, despite all these interventions the rates of youth homicide, violent crime, suicide, drug deaths and teenage pregnancies rose dramatically (Males, 1996).

Coontz (1995) argues that this has occurred because the long-term structural changes that

underlie many of the problems have been ignored. Issues such as poverty, abuse and adult behaviours (violence) on teenagers often receive very little attention in the political arena (Males, 1996).

In a later section, I discuss how the development of the 'risk society' was in response to social concerns around uncertainty and control. The language of risk has become quite popular especially within youth studies. Understanding how risk is defined and used to regulate the behaviour of youth is important since it has provoked a number of practices and regulations that have the potential to impact negatively on youth. But first, I want to examine how the family has been constructed as a mechanism to reproduce middle class norms. I then explore how interventions (e.g. Children's Aid Societies) into families' lives, especially those who are not conforming to social norms, have been justified.

Creation of Family

"The family' is not only a product of the larger society, but also its producer and reproducer. Any adequate historical understanding of family must acknowledge its central role in social and political as well as personal relationships, in societal as well as biological reproduction. 'The family' may be classified as a 'natural' or biological unit, a 'traditional', divinely ordained, and universal entity, but it also very much a social construction. It is whatever we need it to be, at once the source of all good and of all evil". (Comacchio, 1999, p.6)

A government machine?

It is interesting to note that it was not until the period of modernity that the family, as a unit, became of interest to the state. Foucault (1978) indicated that

previously the sovereign was not concerned about the state of affairs within families or their health and well-being. However, in order to benefit the sovereign it was concluded that through the “art of government”, which involved making the head of the household responsible for all aspects of the family’s life, the needs of the sovereign could be achieved (Tait, 2000). Therefore, the family’s designation as a governing unit became emphasized.

Similar to Foucault’s writings, Aries (1967) argued that in the fourteenth century, the modern family began to take shape. The system of power changed from the sovereign as overseer of the population to that of patriarchy, where males were identified as the dominant force within each family. Therefore, “a value was attributed to the family which had previously been attributed to the line. It became the social cell, the basis of the State, the foundation of the monarchy” (Aries, 1967, p.367).

The significant piece here is that the family served a specific function for the sovereign that elevated the importance of families and precipitated the beginning of its manipulation by outside forces. Donzelot (1980) in his book *The Policing of Families* argued that the central role of the family became the production and government of good children. This production was overseen by, “medical, educational, and psychological experts who successfully bridged the gap between the inner workings of the family unit and the broadest objectives of government” (Tait, p.69).

Comacchio (1999) identifies how the concept of family has become so encompassing and enduring when she says,

“Much of the family’s symbolic power comes from the religious, moral and ideological forces that have sustained it in the face of continued threats, real and

imagined. Add to these the power of law, education, science and the state, and it is clear why the family's institutional basis is so durable. A pervasive ideology of 'familism' has left few social relations untouched" (p. 147).

Comacchio highlights a number of key points. The family has been subjected to religious and political forces that have strengthened its purpose and argued its usefulness. Any 'attack' on the 'ideal' family is often matched with activism from people or groups who promote religious ideology. Significantly, the family has also functioned as a means to teach appropriate conduct to future generations (Tait, 2000). Middle class norms have been promoted and perpetuated, either through families incorporating these norms into their daily lives or by its use as a baseline to judge families who do things differently. Those families who fail to meet the 'norms' are often labelled as deviant or dysfunctional. In this next section I will examine how this identification of deviancy has enabled the state to intervene into families and place expectations on parents that meet middle-class standards.

Creation of the 'Dysfunctional Family'

"To protect their society and the families as its base, reformers asserted rules for proper family relations, and encouraged public surveillance of families to see that they were followed. The crisis that they identified hinged on the great divide between their own middle-class families and those of other Canadians. Yet it was just as much about the gap between the ideal family – the family as it ought to be – and families as they actually existed. Convinced that the social problems were increasing at an alarming rate, reformers blamed pathological families, directly

linking 'broken homes', sexual immorality, juvenile delinquency, and violence.
(Comacchio, 1999, p.49)

Coontz (1992) argued that many of our 'memories' about family life are myths and that families have never lived up to nostalgic notions about 'the way things used to be' (p.2). Despite this recognition, these myths continue to hold a lot of power in the way that families, especially families that break from traditional values, are talked about and treated. For example, the notion that youth are more problematic today because of the breakdown of families and family values continues to be cited as the cause of increasing crime rates (Woodson, 2001).

Blaming the family for the behaviour of the children has served a number of purposes. Scraton (1997) argued that the creation of the dysfunctional family has served to disguise the reality that adult power is a problem in ALL families. By focusing on those families who either use their power beyond the limit (e.g. child abuse) or fail to use it (e.g. parental neglect) we can ignore that power imbalances exist in every family. Scraton (1997) adds that, "the routine ordinariness of adult power and violence within the family is diminished by theoretical assumptions and professional practices which contribute causation to deviant, dangerous or pathological individuals and families" (p. 70). Hence, over the years we have collected a plethora of scientific data that has served to reassure us that deviancy can be explained by looking at the individual and their family background.

The creation of the dysfunctional family has also served to create an explanation for, and a solution to, several categories of problems (Dimmock, 2004). By identifying problems as existing within families it has encouraged development and implementation

of programs that target “at risk” families. Through focusing on families as the locus of change we have been able to avoid seriously addressing the systemic and economic imbalances that have plagued families throughout history. For example, rather than addressing increased youth unemployment because of the emphasis on credentials and the elimination of apprenticeship programs, youth are said to lack qualifications because they fail to succeed at school due to limited parental supervision (Dimmock, 2004).

Placing the blame on families has treated social problems as identifiable, manageable and treatable. By examining how the child protection system has been developed we can see that it has been complicit in attempting to manage the population.

Child Protection

One of the significant systems of intervention that have had a profound impact on family life is child protection. Foucault (1980) described how during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries family lifestyle (especially the conduct of sex) was subject to social controls. Along with the fields of medicine, psychology and criminal justice, social work served as a tool to monitor families. Foucault stated that the purveyors of social controls,

“screened the sexuality of couples, parents, and children, dangerous and endangered adolescents - undertaking to protect, separate and forewarn, signaling perils everywhere, awakening peoples attentions, calling for diagnoses, piling up reports, organizing therapies” (p.31).

Mariana Valverde (1991), in her book *The Age of Light, Water and Soap*, studies the “social purity movement” that began at the turn of the twentieth century in Canada. The social purity movement was an informal network of organizations and individuals, mostly church people, educators, doctors, and those we would now describe as

community and social workers, whose goal was to “raise the moral tone” of Canadian society (p.17). Of particular interest to this group were the urban working class communities. Promoting sexual morality, prohibition and Sunday observance were the key issues of the social purity movement and they were thought to solve the problems of poverty, crime and vice. Valverde pays particular attention to the philanthropic organizations and individuals who championed these campaigns. She highlights how the state played a secondary role, either as supplementing private initiatives or acting like a philanthropic organization. What Valverde stresses is that the state did not have the monopoly on moral regulation, but rather private organizations – notably the medial and legal professions and the philanthropic groups – have played a crucial leadership role in establishing the social norms. To extrapolate this to the world of child protection, the state has not necessarily dictated how this type of work should be conducted: rather we must examine how professions such as social work have played a part in setting up the system.

In North America, an increase in child protection cases occurred during the late nineteenth century, when social reformers widened their definition of needy children to include those who suffered from parental neglect or cruelty (Bullen, 1991). The growing interest in childhood as a distinct stage requiring special attention combined with the notion that the future of the society was linked to the welfare of children; there was great concern, predominately in the middle and upper classes, about the future of these children and thus began what has been referred to as the “first wave of the child rescue movement” (Tomison, 2001). At first, it was run by volunteers. However, in order to

address the increasing need for intervention the introduction and training of paid social workers occurred (Bullen, 1991).

Intervention into families began as a means to model appropriate behaviour to parents who were deemed to be lacking. However, the growing belief in the influence of the environment led to reformers insisting that the only means to 'save' these children, who were living in urban poor communities, was to remove them and place them in a rural family setting (Peikoff & Brickey, 1991). There was a strong belief that rural life, which consisted of being involved in agricultural labour, was the means to instill morality and responsibility in children. This approach was also used with adolescents. During the late 1800s, a New York child protection agency conducted a very controversial program that involved being a 'placing agency' for both voluntary and non-voluntary youth. It involved moving young people who were either living on the streets (referred to as waifs or strays), or young people living at home but finding it difficult to locate work, into rural families who needed labourers (Gish, 1999). Finn (2001) indicated that this program was based on both pity for, and condemnation of the poor, and a fear of the potential political and social force of this group as they aged.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, laws that supported state intervention were introduced. This legalization of intervention into family life legitimized the role of social work and served as a means to threaten families who were resisting involvement (McGillivray, 1997). Social workers were able to approach the courts to get permission to remove children. Over the next two decades, the state considerably increased the conditions under which it could apprehend children. Previously, preventing infanticide and severe physical abuse had been the main interests. However, with its growing

authority the state became involved in monitoring the health care and educational needs of children (Piekoff & Brickey, 1991).

Over the past several decades there has continued to be an expansion of child protection services. In Canada, one of the groups significantly impacted by this state intervention into children's care has been the Aboriginal community. "The Sixties Scoop" is a term that Patrick Johnston (1983), author of *Native Children and the Child Welfare System*, coined to describe the mass removal of Aboriginal children from their communities and placement into foster care or into white adoptive families. While the authorities at the time considered these apprehensions in the "best of the interest of the child", Aboriginal activists from the beginning condemned this practice and labelled them as actions from the Federal and Provincial governments to force assimilation and cultural genocide (The Aboriginal Justice Implementation Committee, 1999). The Aboriginal parents who did not follow what was considered to be appropriate, Westernized ways of raising children found their parenting styles misunderstood and unvalued by non-Aboriginal social workers. As a result, between 1971 and 1981 alone, over 3,400 Aboriginal children were shipped away to adoptive parents in other societies, and sometimes in other countries (Johnston, 1983).

Mack (2000), in her scathing critique of child protection, suggested that all families are at risk of a "parentectomy", as the system is hypersensitive to parental behaviour that may cause harm to children. She cites incidents of children being removed from their families due to "spanking, grounding, for home schooling, and even for no reason other than a suspicion...that while conditions in the home are at present stable, they may be conducive to neglect or abuse in the future" (p.59). We cannot

dismiss Mack's statements as an over-exaggeration of the situation as the statistics support the argument that there has been an increase in the number of investigations of families and in the number of children admitted into care. As stated in the Ontario Children's Aid Society annual report, from March of 1998 to March of 2003, there had been a 47% increase in the number of investigations conducted and a 58% increase in the number of children admitted into care.

One way to explain the increase in child protection cases is to examine the development of the risk society. Beck (1992), in his exploration of the nature of modernity, wrote that a shift had occurred from the 'class' society to a 'risk' society. He wrote,

"in the transition from class to risk society, the *quality* of community begins to change. (...) Class societies remain related to the ideal of *equality* in their developmental dynamics...Not so the risk society. Its normative counter-project, which is its basis and motive force, is safety...Basically, one is no longer concerned with attaining something 'good' but rather with *preventing* the worst (emphasis in original, p.49).

In short, Beck argued that instead of using the past to determine the present, society has become more concerned about predicting the future in order to prevent or take precautions against the problems and crises of tomorrow. Mayerfield & Bell (1999) argue that this influx of interest in risk is a modern conceptual language that, when taken apart, is really about the historical problems of uncertainty and control. The language of risk is very appealing, as it has provided a means to deal with the uncertainty that human life faces as well as a tool to exert control. Mayerfield & Bell (1999) warned that the

problem with risk is that it is highly rationalistic. They said, “risk explains uncertainty, and it also explains it away. It gives control and it takes control, and therefore we often feel trapped in an iron cage of risk” (p.1). I argue that this notion of being ‘trapped’ by risk seems reflective of the way that risk is dialogued in today’s society. For example, parents see their children at greater risk of harm from outside influences than when they were young. The language of risk has spread throughout the population such that it has become a collective state of mind rather than an objective reality (Smith, 2004). In order to cope with this risk all sorts of assessment and management tools have been established which attempt to predict and prevent risk.

Smith (2003) stated that over the past decade the child protection system has been placed under pressure to investigate and manage risk. Smith argued that this is an impossible task, one in which the social work profession has been complicit, since its main promise to protect children is one on which it cannot deliver. Unfortunately, the time spent trying to manage risk has come at the expense of the overall concern for the welfare of children. He described how he saw the shift in social work, “where there was once dialogue there is now dogma; where there was practice wisdom, there is now prescription; where there was once assessment there is now investigation (and the ubiquitous ‘risk assessment’) (2003, p.2). Though Smith makes some credible statements about how the system has changed he seems to idealize the past and fails to acknowledge how the child protection system has served, from its very beginning, as a ‘front’ for the government to manage the conduct of the population. Just as families have been held responsible for the conduct of their children and youth, the child protection system has been held responsible for the failure to protect. By placing the blame onto these

institutions it has allowed a critical examination of the distribution of power, the role of government and the reproduction of power by institutions such as the child protection system to be avoided. It is here that I turn to the work of Foucault, whose work has been influential in examining the modern exercise of governmental power.

Theoretical Underpinning

Governmentality.

In his early work, *Discipline & Punishment*, Foucault (1977) described a shift during the sixteenth to nineteenth century in the way the sovereign treated the population. What was different about this style of government was that it sought to cover the entire social body. By ensuring the docility and utility of his subjects the sovereign ensured his principality, even in the face of threats to his rule from inside and outside his territory (Tait, 2000). Several new techniques were employed which included: 1) treatment of the body as an individual rather than as a collective, “indossociable body”; 2) interest in the person as a whole, their movements, their attitudes, and their language; and 3) managing peoples’ time, space and movement such that they were never free from the “uninterrupted, constant coercion” and control which sought to supervise “the processes of the activity rather than its result”. (Foucault, 1977, p.137). Foucault later referred to this as governmentality or “the art of government”, whereby power is exercised from innumerable points. However, one would be misreading Foucault’s argument if it were purported that the state has the monopoly on moral regulation. Rather, Foucault stresses that every individual plays a role in reproducing power in that the individual internalizes the norms of their particular social group and becomes his own overseer (Foucault, 1977). In the following sections I examine a) how the use of ‘experts’ have allowed the

state to ‘govern from a distance’, b) explore how we as individuals are engaged in regulating ourselves, and c) how these two concepts have shaped my approach to conducting an examination of my role as a child protection worker.

Power Over Population.

Through the use of disciplines, such as education, medicine and social work, the population has been observed and regulated. Tait (2000) uses this conceptual framework to examine how the sexual behaviour of youth has been managed. Tait (2000) argues that the government has managed sexual behaviour of youth by making it the object of a number of governmental programs. Through the implementation of these programs onto the population the state has been able to maintain its position as being an objective ‘overseer’. The employment of experts to address the ‘problem’ has firmly located youth sexuality as deviant and needing to be contained. Families and schools have been pinpointed as the institutions responsible for preventing sexual behaviour. However, these institutions are not free to determine how to manage young people’s sexuality. Through the norms that have been promoted by the experts and the family internalizing the expectations and assuming responsibility, the state is able to govern from a distance.

Kelly (2000) used Foucault’s work on disciplinary, sovereign and governmental forms of power as a generative framework to analyze what he termed the ‘institutionalized mistrust, surveillance and regulation of youth’. Kelly (2000) argued that the use of experts has served an important purpose. Pathologizing individuals and subcultures as dangerous allows the exercising of power over “dangerous” youth as well as a reason to subject all youth to surveillance and regulation. More than that, Kelly added, it suggests that this type of management is absolutely necessary and in the

population's best interest. What it does allow, but fails to acknowledge, is that the focus is then shifted away from looking at how institutions have played a part in shaping all youth. Rather, the increased anxiety about 'dangerous' youth provides support for the idea that these institutions are necessary.

Power As Relationship.

Tait's (2000) and Kelly's (2000) work on analyzing interventions that involve youth is important. However, what is missing is an understanding of how youth engage in, react to, or resist these interventions. The field of youth studies has a plethora of research that identifies how youth are subject to institutions and interventions that attempt to regulate youth behaviours (Tait, 2000). What this has created is a top-down understanding of power and its effects on youth. Said differently, it has continued to reinforce the notion that adults have all the power and youth have no power and are passive recipients. I argue that this is limiting and not reflective of how power is experienced.

Foucault's work suggests a different way to conceptualize power, in that it is "exercised from innumerable points and should be analyzed as something that circulates throughout a complex of social techniques, practices and routines" (Tait, p.58). Hence, power comes through us, around us and over us. We are all subject to power but we are also reproducers of power. We are not passive recipients of power but rather "we are involved in accepting or resisting the normative constraints placed upon us.....Whether accepting or rejecting it, though, [we] are all actively engaged in the process" (Butin, P.162).

Foucault also stressed that it was imperative that the exercise of power be viewed as productive and organizational rather than oppressive. He said, "The individual is an effect of power, and at the same time or precisely to the extent which it is that effect, it is the element of its articulation" (Foucault, 1980). Hence, we are created by power. The very exercise of power draws us into existence and produces our subjectivities. Hence, it gives us a name to call ourselves and others. By the very nature of calling oneself woman, White, daughter etc. it places the multiplicity of other subjects such as man, Asian, father, in contrast. Power, from a Foucaultian perspective, is not necessarily about who has it and who does not. Power is "a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as much as those whom it is exercised" ¹(Foucault, 1980, p.156).

Foucault also stressed that power does not exist in some abstract sense but is embedded in the relations among individuals and groups. Relations of power become identifiable and analyzable through individuals (and groups) engaging with each other (Butin, 2001). As well, resistance also occurs within relationships. At the moment of domination by another, there is a space of resistance that is created. Resistance may take the form of seizing the practices imposed by another and transforming them. It may also occur in more subtle ways such as the use of humour or passivity (Scott, 1990).

Therefore, if we want to examine how power and resistance are taken up and used then we have to explore the relationships that we are engaged in.

¹ Foucault (1980) stated that power "reaches into the very grain of individuals, touches their bodies and inserts itself into their actions and attitudes, their discourses and every-day lives (p.39)". Though this project is focused on addressing power from a Foucaultian perspective there were times that I referenced power as something I owned. In examining why this occurred, I recognized that though power was something I was uncomfortable with, it was also something I did not necessarily want to give away or view as something that was assigned to me. In the moments that I stepped out of viewing power as something I owned it took work and opened up some very painful, emotional wounds. It was safer to look out at the world viewing myself as a person with inherent power, rather than as a person struggling with coming to terms with how power was assigned to me as a White woman as well as how I took up and used power.

Some research studies have used this approach to examine the role of ‘experts’ in the provision of services to clients. Peckover (2002) draws on the notion of disciplinary power to explore the role of British health visiting (referred to as Public Health Nurses in Canada) and whether it can be understood in terms of support or surveillance. It draws on interviews with health visitors and how they view their role as exercising disciplinary practices. Findings suggest tensions in the health worker’s role between welfare and surveillance. One of the limitations of Peckover’s (2002) work is that it fails to identify what could be possible for both workers and clients amidst this tension.

However, Keenan’s (2001) analysis of her role as a psychotherapist and her relationship with her client takes some steps in this direction. Keenan (2001), using Foucault’s notion of power relations, identifies how spaces of resistance developed for both her and her client within and because of their relationship. Keenan (2001) identifies one of the key aspects of resistance, which is the notion of struggle. As Keenan struggled and addressed her own feelings of anxiety and tension about her client’s suicide attempts it opened up the possibility for new areas of discussion to occur with her client. I argue that this is an example of Keenan resisting disciplinary practices. Due to her status as a therapist and therein her responsibility to ensure her patient’s safety, Keenan could have recommended and/or sought out hospitalization for her client in order to minimize her anxiety about her client’s suicide attempts. Instead Keenan acknowledged her feelings of anxiety and tension as her own and used the counselling sessions to focus on the key themes behind her client’s behaviour such as grief, guilt and fear. Keenan’s work illustrates well what could be possible if we take a look at the complexities within relationships and acknowledge the uncertainty and tension that exists and how this can

shape social work practice with clients. Butin (2001) argues that amongst this uncertainty, “a greater opportunity exists for transformation” (p.171).

For this project, I am interested in exploring the tensions that are created within a relationship between child protection worker and youth client. What spaces of resistance are created for both worker and youth based on this relationship? How do youth play a part in taking up, negotiating and resisting this relationship? Also, in keeping with Foucault’s position that disciplinary practices need to be exposed, I am interested in examining the practices that workers’ are faced with that, I would argue, suppress the feelings of uncertainty, as well as identify the consequences to both worker and youth when these practices are successful. What might be gained (and lost) in recognizing young people as competent and critical actors, capable of meaningful participation in the decisions that affect their lives? How might reflecting on the youths’ perceptions of the child protection system help me and others to modify practices to work collaboratively with young people? And having engaged in an autoethnography that situates my lived experiences as part of the research ‘data’, what did I learn about myself as a worker, a researcher and as a human being?

Autoethnography: Method and Methodology

Over the past few decades, methods used to conduct research have broadened. Arguments launched by postmodernists about our ability to 1) ‘know’ others, 2) group people according to characteristics, and 3) be objective, have brought forth the inconsistencies and limitations of scientific research (see Tierney, 2001). Postmodernists have suggested that knowledge is not something ‘hidden’ within individuals waiting to be ‘discovered’. Rather, knowledge is created by and between individuals and groups.

Knowledge, then, is not unitary but rather shifting based on social, cultural and political contexts. This is different from the modernist model that suggests that knowledge is cumulative and linear and could be obtained value-free within the research process. Post-modernist researchers acknowledge that there are limitations to knowledge being described because language is not neutral. Over the years, philosophers have pointed out that the ‘facts’ scientists saw were inextricably linked to the vocabulary they used to express or represent them (see Toulmin, 1969, Rorty, 1982).

The recognition, especially within the qualitative field, that completely objective research is not attainable has led to new approaches to conducting, and writing up, research. One approach shifted the focus of the research onto “observing the observer” and writing more directly, from the source of one’s own experience (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p.747). This style of research and writing is commonly referred to as autoethnography.

What is Autoethnography?

Ellis & Bochner (2000) defined autoethnography as “an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (p.739). Usually written in first person accounts, the researcher’s personal experience is used to illuminate a particular culture, event and/or institution. Often starting with the exploration of a social experience, the researcher reflects back on self and looks deeply at “self-other interactions” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Through this process of examination and reflection you come to know yourself in deeper ways and as Ellis & Bochner (2000) argue, “by understanding yourself comes understanding of others”(p. 738).

Over the years, the use of autoethnography has evolved in a manner that makes exact definition and application difficult. Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggest that it is now appropriate to incorporate under the broad rubric of autoethnography studies that have been referred to by other similarly situated terms such as personal narratives, narrative ethnography, and critical autobiography. Autoethnographic studies vary in their emphases, some focus on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethno) and on self (auto). What they have in common is that they connect the personal to the cultural.

The telling of one's experience is not to attempt to explain or to seek the singular truth but rather to bring attention to the complexities of lived experiences.

Autoethnography acknowledges that recollections of one's experiences are always stories, in that they are never fully complete in recalling the past. Instead of trying to analyze the past it provides a story so that readers decide for themselves what meaning it has for them in their lives. Ellis & Bochner (2000) suggest that these texts "long to be used rather than analyzed, to be told and retold rather than theorized and settled; to offer lessons for further conversation rather than undebatable conclusions..." (p.744).

Bochner (2000) described why he turned to autoethnography as a research method.

"I wanted a more personal, collaborative and interactive relationship, one that centred on the question of how human experience is endowed with meaning and on the moral and ethical choices we face as human beings who live in an uncertain and changing world. I also wanted to understand the conventions that constrain which stories we can tell and how we can tell them and to show how people can and do resist the forms of social control that marginalize or silence

counternarratives, stories that deviate from or transgress the canonical ones”
(p.744).

Bochner addresses here that autoethnography is an effective means to document one person’s experience of examining relationships within the world. Similar to the intent of this project, Bochner used autoethnography to examine how we are faced with conventions that attempt to constrain us but also how we find ways to resist and create new “ways of being” (see Ellis & Bochner in Ellis & Flaherty, 1992).

There are a couple of other reasons why this research method fits with the methodology of this project. First, because autoethnography situates the researcher as the subject, the issue of positioning is dealt with in detail. Not only does the critical role that researchers play in selecting and conducting research get identified but is continually addressed throughout the process. This is important, as identifying one’s position in relation to the project and to the participants has become a crucial element of good qualitative research (see Acker, 2000, Gabriel, 2000).

Second, autoethnography acknowledges that the researcher is an “active agent” who will be impacted by listening to, and writing about, other people’s stories and allows for documentation of this ‘transformation’. I was drawn to the idea that autoethnography “stresses the journey over the destination” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000 p.744). This is important because it identifies that there is so much more to research than just the final results. It is a process that is personal, convoluted, agonizing and transformational. Stressing the journey also resists the standard practice of portraying social life and relationships as a “snap shot” (p.744). Ellis and Bochner (1999) argue that researchers have been trained into this monologic style of reporting but for some researchers this has

left them dissatisfied with the product as it is not representative of their lived experiences. Rather than aiming to report truths, autoethnography promotes dialogue (Ellis & Bochner, 1999). Readers are engaged with the text on an emotional level, thinking along with the researcher about their own personal experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 2000).

Autoethnography: Addressing Credibility

Writers of autoethnography are not interested in developing a specified framework for others to follow. This is too much like other formalized methods of inquiry which in many ways limit and constrain ways of collecting information. However, this has left autoethnography open to criticism, as it does not provide clear guidelines, especially for those who judge qualitative inquiries (Holt, 2003). Rather than providing a framework, Ellis & Bochner (2000) discuss how issues that are often questioned in qualitative research such as validity, reliability and accountability can be addressed.

One aspect of promoting credibility in qualitative research is describing the history/experiences of the researcher such that he or she is viewed as a capable researcher. In contrast to some other research methods, using autoethnography allowed for my ten years of work experience with youth in crisis to provide some context to this current project. Since I have provided service to this population it gives support to the notion that I have some insight into the challenges of this population.

Accountability also involves documenting who the person is collecting and analyzing the evidence. Autoethnography recognizes that as researchers we are not only central to the selection of the topic but also how the research will be analyzed and

reported. Rather than attempting to control for researcher bias, autoethnography uses the researcher's lived experience and relationships as a topic of investigation (Noy, 2003).

Validity or credibility of qualitative research can be addressed through instituting practices that promote rigor. However, an acceptance within the field of what these practices are has remained hotly debated (Caelli, Ray & Mill, 2003). In response to arguments around inconsistencies of practices within qualitative research, Sandelowski and Barroso (2002) argue that due to the wide range of methodologies that fall within the rubric of qualitative research, no singular set of procedures can exist. Rather each qualitative approach needs to be evaluated in a manner that is congruent with the intentions set out in the beginning of the research process. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the researcher to explain how validity will be addressed. For this I turn to Ellis and Bochner's (2000) explanation on how autoethnography can address issues of validity. They said, "validity means that our work seeks verisimilitude: it evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible" (p.751). Therefore, this project aims to create a document that will resonate with, and hopefully inspire other people who work with youth.

One of the main differences in post-modern research is the move away from establishing findings that generalize across the population. Rather, through the use of the researcher's case, the reader creates the generalizations for themselves, given their own experiences. There is a shift from "generalization across cases to generalization from within a case" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000 p.744).

Autoethnography: Filling the gap

For this project, I was specifically interested in examining youths' experiences of a child protection agency. I argue that if child protection workers are to service this population well, a greater awareness about how youth see and understand the system is important. But this project was more than exploring 'others' experiences. I felt it was necessary as a researcher and as a child and youth worker to, as Ellis & Bochner describe, "reflexively bend back on self and look more deeply at self/other interactions" (p.740).

For four years, I was an 'insider' to the culture of one specific child protection agency. My experiences within the child protection agency left me with the conclusion that as a worker I played a significant role in the determination of intervention with youth and their families. I also came away with the notion that if I wanted to precipitate change in how this population was served I had to begin with myself. Therefore, I went into this project not only interested in exploring the experiences of youth but also to reflect on my own role, either positive or negative, within these interactions. This fits with the theoretical arguments made earlier that in order to better understand 'others' we must also come to understand our 'self'.

There are a number of benefits to engaging in this inquiry. First, there is very little research on the experiences of young people who are at risk of coming into care. Much of the research on child protection services falls into one of the following categories: a) examining the causes of admission to care (e.g. percentage of abuse, neglect cases), b) critiquing the foster care system, and c) examining the experiences of children and youth who have spent a number of years living in care. Fine, Palmer & Coady (2001), in preparing for their research on clients' views on child welfare services,

completed a chart that consolidated the findings of existing research. In reviewing this chart and seeking out additional research, I found that there have been a handful of studies that have looked at the perceptions of parents. For example, Callahan & Lamb (1994), McCallum (1995) and Maiter, Palmer & Manji (2003) interviewed parents who were receiving services from a child protection agency. Research that examined youth perspectives predominately involved interviewing youth already in care or emancipated from care and asking them to reflect back on these experiences (see Raychaba, 1993, Chalmers, 1996, and Leslie & Hare, 2000).

There was no research I found that looked at perceptions of youth who were involved with a child protection service and at risk of being admitted into care. Also, there was no research that examined child protection workers' reflections on their work with children or youth. Therefore, this research adds to the field.

Using a reflexive approach allowed for the documentation of my journey of transformation and may encourage other professionals to participate in a similar exploration. The benefits of self-reflection within the helping profession are numerous. One of the important benefits is the increased likelihood that workers will search for new ways to interact with others and seek new possibilities within the relationships (Miehls & Moffat, 2000).

Procedure

Recruitment Method

Due to an existing relationship with one particular child protection agency, I approached the Senior Management about the possibility of conducting this research. During my seven years of employment and a previous research study that I had

conducted with this particular agency, a level of credibility had been established with them. After gaining the agency's consent to conduct the project, I attended a meeting at the Children's Aid office to present my project to 15 Family Services Workers. During that meeting I explained the purpose and intent of the project and asked them to think about their caseload and whether they had youth/families who would consider participating. The criteria I had for participants included:

- a) the young person in the family is between the ages of 13 and 15
- b) the young person is at risk of coming into care due to safety concerns either from the young person's behaviour or the parent's behaviour
- c) the young person had never been in care
- d) the young person would not be placed at higher risk by participating in this study.

Participants were obtained based on purposeful and nomination methods (Morse, 1994). Workers who identified a potential participant were provided with a telephone script and a recruitment letter for both parent and youth. In order to protect the identity of the families, the Family Services Worker approached the nominated family with an outline of the project and an invitation to participate. If the youth/family were interested they provided verbal consent to their worker to release their name and phone number. I then followed up with a phone call.

Participants

In total, eleven youth were invited to participate, however, only three youth were interviewed. Eight youth declined to participate for varying reasons. The Family Services Workers reported the following as reasons for the youths' turning down the request: three youth declined because their involvement with the Children's Aid was

coming to an end and they did not want to have any more meetings; one youth declined because, according to the worker, she did not want to do anything that would “help” her social worker; one youth was interested in participating, but due to conflict between the youth and father, the father did not consent. The small sample size was appropriate, as I was not attempting to determine common characteristics or make generalizations about any group. Two of the three participants were female. All three participants identified themselves as Caucasian and raised in Canada. All three participants were living in single, female-headed families. Their involvement with the child protection agency varied from six months to 1 year. For one youth, this was her third involvement with a child protection agency. For the other two youth the current involvement had been their first.

Data Collection Method

One source of data was obtained by conducting individual, audiotaped, semi-structured interviews with the youth. Berg (2004) indicated that using a semi-structured interview reflects an awareness that individuals see the world in varying ways and allows the interviewer to adjust the wording of the questions to incorporate the subject’s perspective. As well, using a semi-structured approach allowed me to pursue a line of questioning that arose during the interview but was not considered while determining the interview schedule.

Ellis and Bochner (2000) stated that autoethnographers vary in their emphasis on the research process (graphy), on culture (ethno) and self (auto) and there is disagreement among researchers on the boundaries of each category. Ellis and Bochner (2000) suggest viewing autoethnography along a continuum rather than limiting it to a precise definition.

One area in this autoethnography that may cause some confusion is around my choice to conduct standard ethnographic interviews with youth. I chose to conduct this type of interviews with youth for two reasons: one, to initiate a discussion with the youth around how they saw power relations operating in order to draw comparisons between their perceptions and my own, and the second reason was to be 'in the moment'. Though I could have used a method where I recalled my interactions with clients it seemed much more effective if I was going *into* the interviews with youth cognizant about identifying and analyzing power relations. I feel that this approach was beneficial as there were times that I found myself surprised about how I handled myself in these interviews. It is likely that this would not have occurred had I only used my memories and recollections of past interviews.

A second source of data was my journals. Berg (2004) indicated that though conceptually recognized as a means of data collection by Allport (1942) and Denzin (1978), journalling remains an under-utilized method in research. There are several advantages to using journals (see Courtright, 1994). Most importantly, journalling provided an opportunity for me to reflect on my own performance and interactions with others. Hence, I wrote in my journals before and after the interviews with youth to reflect on their answers to the interview questions as well as examine my performance.

In addition to journalling about the interviews with youth I also wrote about my previous experiences as a worker. To assist with recalling some of these experiences I visited the Children's Aid office where I used to work, sat at my old desk, and talked with some of the staff. Using systematic sociological introspection (Ellis, 1991), which

means paying attention to the physical feelings, thoughts and emotions, I wrote about this experience. Ronai (1989) used this approach to conduct a retrospective account of her experience as an exotic dancer.

Lastly, I used my journals to chronicle my research experience, in that I wrote about what I had learned about myself, what had transformed my thinking, and how I could use this to consider a new way of working collaboratively with youth. Using a reflexive approach allowed for the documentation of my journey of transformation and may encourage other professionals to participate in a similar exploration.

Data Analysis

One week after the final interview was completed I began the process of analyzing the data. I started with transcribing the tapes of the youth interviews. Lapadat & Lindsay (1999) argue that the transcription process is not an objective activity but rather involves the researcher making choices that impact on the interpretations that can be drawn from the data. Hence, Lapadat & Lindsay (1999) stressed the importance of outlining how the transcription process was approached. I approached the process with the question that Kvale (1996) suggested that researchers use, which is “What is a useful transcription for my research purposes?” (p.166). Rather than aiming for completeness, which Kvale states is not achievable, I created a transcript that was in keeping with the purpose of this project. Hence, the transcript consisted of the youth’s responses to the interview questions, with specific emphasis on statements that I identified as highlighting issues of power relations and resistance as well as statements that resonated with my own experiences of the child welfare system. In order to avoid missing important statements made by the youth I listened to each of the tapes on two separate occasions.

After the transcripts were written I read through each transcript three times in order to code the data into categories (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). The first read involved looking specifically for quotes that addressed the issue of power relations. The second read involved looking for quotes that addressed how the youth and I interacted with, took up and used the power relationships. The third read involved pulling out quotes that resonated with my own experiences of being part of the child welfare system. I then turned to my journals and completed the same steps as described above. Laying out all the quotes obtained from the transcripts and my journals I then examined them according to Foucault's writings on power relations. Foucault (1994) indicated that when analyzing power relations a certain number of points had to be established:

1. *The system of differentiations* – identify the differences that are in place that permits one to act upon the actions of others, e.g. the designation of social worker as being an 'expert'.
2. *The types of objectives* – identify what those who act upon the actions of others, e.g. the maintenance of boundaries between worker and clients, are pursuing.
3. *Instrumental modes* - identify how power is exercised, what methods are used to act upon others, e.g. the use of home visits and documentation
4. *The degrees of rationalization* – identify how power is adjusted, elaborated, transformed such that its instruments can better ensure the desired outcomes, e.g. the introduction of the Risk Assessment Model.

Using the quotes pulled from the transcripts and my journals I categorized them based on the above four points. I also incorporated existing literature on youth, workers and power relations to compare and reflect on the points that I identified.

Lastly, I turned my attention to examine the research process, not only as a researcher but as a participant as well. This allowed me to actively explore my own lived experiences and reflect on the process as a whole. All of the data collected over the process of the study was combined and I examined what I had learned about myself through this entire exploration. As well, I considered what new possibilities became available in regards to working collaboratively with youth.

Analysis

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a form of power came into being that exercised itself through social production and social service. Foucault referred to this as disciplinary power. Disciplinary power sought to obtain productivity from individuals and did so by gaining access to the bodies of individuals, to their actions, attitudes and behaviours. Hence, the introduction of methods such as school discipline that served to make children subject to manipulation and conditioning. Foucault (1980) described this new power as “a web” that permeated all of society (p.39). The population was now subject to “a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application...” that were intended to manage its conduct.

Though Foucault’s discussion on disciplinary power appeared to suggest that power is about domination and control, he went on to argue that power should not be viewed as oppressive and negative but rather as productive and organizational. For

example, one of the ways we have come to know ourselves is through our interactions with specific institutions such as husband/wife, parent/child, and teacher/student.

Foucault was less interested in looking at *why* someone dominates another but rather interested in *how* subjects are constituted to operate in certain ways. Foucault identifies that when analyzing power relationships it is not necessarily to search for its foundation, its source, but rather to examine how power relationships are used, rationalized and internalized.

Foucault's (1994) approach to analyzing power is not to study, "its origin, its principles or its legitimate limits, but of studying the methods and techniques used in different institutional contexts to act upon the behaviour of individuals taken separately or in a group, so as to shape, direct, modify their way of conducting themselves, to impose ends on their inaction or fit into overall strategies..." (p.4).

Therefore, in this next section, I will examine the practices and instruments within a child protection institution that serve to constitute and objectify both workers and clients. At the same time, I will incorporate into these sections what was evoked for me about my experiences as a child protection worker and some reflections on how both the youth and I took up, used and resisted our subjectivities. I also incorporate the suggestions that postmodernists have made about how to do social work differently, such that power relations between workers and clients are acknowledged and adjusted.

The System of Differentiations

Foucault (1994) stated that, "every relationship of power puts into operation differences that are, at the same time, its conditions and its results" (p. 344). Hence,

relationships between clients and child protection workers are based on a set of defined differences that are used to manage the relationship. From the youth interviews and my journal entries, I found the following examples of differences between clients and child protection workers.

I'm the Worker/You're the Client.

While conducting the interviews, I had an opportunity to examine how the notion of child protection worker can go uncontested by clients. For example, one youth responded to a question about the legitimacy of the worker's involvement with him by saying "there's got to a purpose if they're here". However, he goes on to say "I just don't know what that purpose is". This statement is very revealing of the notion that clients, and especially youth clients, may not question the legitimacy of the CAS's involvement. One possible explanation for why clients may not question the intentions or motivations of their workers is that they have internalized the notion that the social work profession is a legitimate field that holds truths, scientific knowledge and technical expertise. In a study conducted by Van Nijnatten and colleagues (2000) they found that youth who were involved with a child protection agency ascribed authority to their worker on the basis of their "supposed expertise" (p.465). The youth indicated that they based their obedience to the worker on professional grounds, as they felt their worker knew what was best (p.466).

Throughout the interviews I conducted, my 'expertise' was never put into question. Despite the fact that the parents and youth heard about me only from their social worker, they did not challenge my 'status' as a worker or as a researcher. For example, the parents and youth did not ask about my qualifications, my training or my

experience. Rather, they engaged with me in ways that served to reinforce my role as a social worker. For example, within the first ten minutes of being in the home of one of the participants, the youth's mother advised me of the psychiatric diagnoses she was struggling with, some of the past abuse she had experienced, and her concerns about her child's behaviour both in the home and out in the community. She also expressed her hope that my discussion with her child might result in a change in behaviour. So, during this very brief interaction the youth's mother identified me as someone who was entitled to hear very personal information and had knowledge and abilities to create change.

The youth also constituted me as a social worker who was entitled to hear personal information about their lives. Despite statements I made that I was not seeking to hear why they were receiving services from a child protection agency invariably the interviews turned to this discussion. The youth shared with me some of their experiences of dealing with a parent who was ill, their use of drugs, and family conflict.

During the interviews, there were times when I found myself reinforcing my role as a worker. In rereading the transcript of one of the interviews I found that after a youth had revealed some information about drug use I had followed up with questions that attempted to explore this further such as why did they use, how often, etc? As well, in my post-interview journal entry I had written: "I'm trying to figure him out, what makes him tick, why does he do the things he does?" The desire to 'know' this youth has come from my training as a worker/helper. I have been taught that to understand and attempt to 'help' my clients I have to ask questions to seek out their understanding of their behaviour. The emphasis in the worker/client relationship is based on getting to know the client through interviewing, helping them to see from where their difficulties stem,

and to give them assistance to change (Trevithick, 2000). In this next section, I will examine how the relationship between worker and client is distinguished by the inequality of how information is collected and shared.

Tell Me More/But Don't Expect Anything Back.

Another difference noted between clients and child protection workers was the imbalance of sharing personal information. As child protection workers providing intervention we expect clients to share with us very personal information, often before a relationship has been formed. As one youth reported, "It took me a long time to get used to them, cause they were asking me all these personal stuff and they don't really know you". However, there is not the same expectation on the worker to share themselves *fully* with clients, rather it is 'discouraged' within the social work profession and in the institution to share much personal information. Self-disclosure is considered a 'hot topic'; as Reamer (2003) reports it can have mixed results in that it "may be both helpful and harmful to the same client--helpful in that the client feels more 'connected' to the social worker and harmful in that the self-disclosure undermines the client's confidence in the social worker" (p. 123). Within in the social work field there is a degree of self-disclosure that is considered 'therapeutic' (Anderson & Mandell, 1989), in order to develop the relationship with the client. Roberts (2005) outlines the various theories on self-disclosure in therapeutic relationships that range from Haley's position of tight boundaries to narrative viewpoints that suggest that therapists should be transparent about values and life experiences that inform their practices. However, what is not clear is how child protection workers who are in dual roles (as investigator and helper) make decisions

about what to share and what not to share, what influences their decisions about what to share and how they judge whether their self-disclosure was ‘therapeutic’ or not.

I experienced this ambiguity about self-disclosure multiple times as a child protection worker. I especially struggled with disclosing my concerns and frustrations with the system, as I was worried that I was crossing the professional boundary line. Put differently, I was worried that if I shared too much about myself the focus was on *my* issues and not those of the clients. During the interviews with youth, I found that self-disclosure was something that I deemed important but it also created in me a sense of uncertainty. After one particular interview I wrote in my journal:

“I’m talking to J. about how workers don’t share personal stuff but when I shared about my own struggles with being a child protection worker I felt uncomfortable. I had a physical reaction during the discussion, my speech became muddled, I struggled to find words, and my heart beat faster. I had this nagging voice in my head that was questioning my intentions and warning me that I might be crossing a line. But I also saw that the more I shared with J. the more she shared back”.

I recognized that there was a struggle for me between a) wanting to be reciprocal in sharing personal information and using it to develop rapport with my client, and b) the ‘ingrained’ notion that self-disclosure is a practice that should be used only to ‘help’ the client. There is no simple answer to how much information is too much or when and how self-disclosure should be used. Rather what I want to emphasize is that as child protection workers we need to keep in mind that we have the privilege of being able to select what we can and do share. Compared to clients, workers are not faced with strategies (such as interviews) whereby our personal information is sought and

interrogated. One youth commented about how social workers are not faced with personal questions, “They probably wouldn’t like it if they were asked those types of questions”.

In completing the analyses of the interviews I noticed that not only was there an imbalance of sharing of personal information but there also appeared to be an imbalance about how much the youth and the worker knew about the system. In this next section, I examine how ‘cases’ are handled such that workers are constituted as in control.

I’m In Control.

Throughout the three interviews the youth each raised areas over which they felt they had little control. They all indicated that it was the social worker who called and set up the home visits, without directly speaking to the youth to determine their availability. Home visits were arranged between the social worker and their mothers, and all three youth reported that they were frustrated that they received very little notice that the worker was coming. Another area that they felt they had no control over was when the worker would close the case. None of the youth could identify what it would take for the worker to stop visiting and they were unclear about what the ‘goals’ were. All three youth expressed some uncertainty around how decisions were made. For example, one youth reported, “I think they read what we said and then make their own decisions”. Another youth stated that she was not sure how decisions got made because, “They don’t tell me”. The notion that youth are often left out, ignored and disrespected by the child protection system has been reported in several research studies. Youth report that when dealing with the child protection system they have felt powerless because they were not

given important information about plans or decisions about their lives (Fine, Palmer and Coady, 2001, Chalmers, 1996, Callahan et al, 2000, Gove, 1995).

I suggest that there are some important benefits to providing youth with more information about how the child protection system works, the expectations that workers' have to meet, etc. It appears that the youth who participated in this research also saw some benefit to knowing more. For example, when one youth learned about the legal requirements her social worker had regarding the number of visits, she stated that it changed her perception of the worker. She said, "Now I understand why he comes so much". It made me wondering, why is it that youth report knowing little about how the system works? My initial reaction was to blame the workers for not taking the time to explain the system. However, it came out in the interviews with the youth that there was no consensus whether or not *all* youth wanted more information about the system. In one interview, the youth clearly stated that she was not interested in learning about how the system worked. This comment challenged my view that as workers we need to be educating *all* youth about the system. Rather it left me a dilemma, how do workers who recognize that youth feel powerless within the system work with youth who express no interest in learning more about how the system operates? At the same time, my belief that educating youth about the system was important came into question. Though I thought it was important, what was the value to the youth of knowing more? Could this in fact deepen their governance? These raise important questions that could benefit from further research. For example, what kind of impact does awareness of the system have on youth's behaviour and view of the system? And is not being interested about the system a form of resistance?

During the interviews with youth there also arose some discussion about what type of information and how much information they could ‘handle’. One youth indicated that she was not aware of many of the details of her family’s involvement with the Children’s Aid because she was told, “It wasn’t my thing to worry about”. From my experience, I found that there was a different form of information sharing with adult clients versus youth clients. Youth clients were often left out of or excluded from certain pieces of information, such as the treatment needs of their parent(s). I am curious if constructions of adolescence such as ‘not quite an adult’ impact on how information is shared with youth. Do workers’ limit what they share with youth based on a ‘belief’ that youth are too vulnerable, and therefore not capable of managing sensitive information? Do child protection workers assume the role of ‘gatekeeper’ when it comes to deciding how much information youth know about the system, their reason for involvement, etc?

The Types of Objectives

Foucault wrote that when analyzing power relations it was important to examine what was being pursued by those who act upon the actions of others. In this next section, I approach this question by examining what child protection workers are often looking for in their work with clients.

Maintenance of Privilege.

In the previous section, I discussed how the assigning of roles (client/worker) is often unquestioned and reproduced. I explored how parents and youth took my status as a social worker at face value. Here, I want to examine further how I as a social worker also wanted to reproduce these roles such that I could fulfill my duties as a worker.

De Montigny (1995a) states that “the art of producing a professional identity allows a person to insert him or herself into discursively organized and warranted relations of power and authority” (p.48). I want to explore this statement by examining what occurred for me during the process of interviewing for this research project. I distinctly recall the anxiety and nervousness I felt while setting up, driving to, and just prior to, the first face-to-face contact with the participants. I remember wondering “what gives me the right to go into this family and ask questions about their experiences?” I remember feeling a need to be rid of the anxiety, as it was overwhelming. This experience of battling uncertainty was not new. During my years as a child protection worker I was frequently faced with situations where I was entering into new relationships with families. Every time I was given a new case it meant that there was a new relationship that had to be established. In looking back at how I handled this anxiety when I was a worker, I recall how I drew on my ‘sense of entitlement’ as a child protection worker. The privilege of being a ‘child protection worker’ provided me with the ‘justification’ to enter into the families’ worlds, especially since some would argue that I was involved for the right reasons, such as trying to prevent children and youth from being harmed. However, this feeling of entitlement was not satisfactory. It was not something that I could ‘buy into’ because rather than addressing my concerns it just covered them up. At the same time, by putting aside my anxiety it prevented an opportunity for the client and me to openly discuss and challenge the roles that were assigned to us as worker and client.

In the past several years, some social workers have argued that there are benefits to addressing our uncertainty and social tensions rather than trying to suppress them.

Miehls and Moffat (2000) suggest that being open to our feelings of anxiety is necessary if we want to be sensitive to the experiences of others. For example, being aware of my own anxiety about meeting new clients, I can imagine (but not assume) how clients might feel anxious about me showing up at their door. By acknowledging my own anxiety and uncertainty with the client I can build a mutual relationship that suggests that both the client and I are open to being altered by the relationship. Stated differently, by viewing the relationship as fluid rather than fixed, in that the worker is the expert and the client is the recipient of service, there is potential for both the worker and client to be transformed by the relationship.

Sharing some of the concerns that the clients have about the system can be a space of resistance for both the client and the worker. At the same time, by joining together to address these concerns it can be a source of empowerment for both worker and client. For example, I recall a young woman who was 15 years old and wanting to leave care to live with her boyfriend who was several years older than she was. I knew that the agency (meaning the supervisor and Director of Services) would be against the idea because of her age. However, in conjunction with the youth, we met with the supervisor and Director of Services to explain the reasons why we both thought it was a good idea (e.g. for stability, as the youth had been subjected to numerous placements within the system). This was after the youth and I talked about the reasons why the supervisor and Director of Services would be against the idea and my own struggle with how the supervisor and Director of Services would view my support of this plan. As expected, the supervisor and Director of Services had concerns about the idea but because the youth and I presented a united front and had solid reasons for the decision they

agreed. This scenario could have played out very differently if I as the worker had bought into the supervisor's and Director of Services' beliefs about what was appropriate for a teenager.

Avoiding the 'gaze'.

Foucault (1977) uses Bentham's Panopticon to describe how individuals have become subject to mechanisms of power that make them visible and cause them to act upon themselves. The principle of the panopticon was this: "at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; (p.200). The building consisted of individual cells with wide windows and black lighting that enabled those in the tower to have an unobstructed view of each person in their cell. The advantage of the panopticon is that it has "made perfect the exercise of power" (p.206). It is efficient, as it requires only a small number of people to observe a large number of subjects. At the same time, by always being subjected to the outside gaze of another, it causes individuals to act upon themselves (p.206). Foucault said:

"He who is subjected to a field of visibility and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power, he makes them play spontaneously upon himself, he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (p. 202).

Foucault takes the principle of the panopticon and describes how it transferred into the management of the entire population, not just those in jails. It became used in education, social work, and in the army. Foucault wrote that "the panopticon has become a transparent building in which the exercise of power may be supervised by society as a whole" (p.207), which Foucault refers to as the "disciplinary society" (p.209). This

subtle form of observing, analyzing and reforming individuals was used to increase the possible utility of individuals. For example, the Christian schools during the seventeenth century that were used to ‘reform’ the children of the poor and prepare them for a future in some form of work, to give them “an observant eye, a sure hand and prompt habits” (Foucault, 1975, p.211).

In using the panopticon to examine child protection services I would suggest that this principle explains how the worker has been prescribed as the ‘watcher’ or ‘inspector’ and the client as the subject. Rather than individual cells, families are monitored in their homes. Rather than wide windows that clearly look into the home, the community has become complicit in watching them. But it is more than how clients are observed. In order to ensure the automatic functioning of power, clients are caught up in a power situation of which they are themselves the bearers. Because clients know they are visible and also because they are never sure whether they are being observed, they have to think that they may always be watched. However, not only are the clients subject to this gaze, the employees of institutions are also subject to this visibility (Foucault, 1975). In the case of child protection workers we are subject to supervision both within and outside of the agency. In a later section, I examine more closely how workers are subject to methods within the institution, such as regular meetings with the supervisor, to monitor the workers’ performance. Here, I want to address how child protection workers are supervised by methods outside of the agency.

Child protection workers are sensitive to the fact that they are subject to unfair representation in the media (Morris, 2005). Media reports on child protection work predominately focus on where the system has failed, such as a child’s death or serious

injury. Research has shown that the risk of being identified in the media and facing legal liability has a significant impact on workers views of themselves. As one participant in Morris's (2005) qualitative study on child protection workers states:

“...the public has a negative perception of what the Department does...the public is only informed of things which go wrong, not the good things that happen on a daily basis. Due to this, many employees feel that they are undervalued and often leave the Department due to scrutiny from the public and the media” (p.142).

Considering the risk to one's reputation, job status and personal wellbeing if something goes wrong on a case, as workers we try to avoid being in the gaze. How do we do this? By putting the youth/family into the spotlight and defining their problems as abnormal. To explore this I turn to the work of Edward Said's (1979) book, *Orientalism*. Said's central thesis is that the Orient has been constructed from the imagination of the West. He addresses the creation of 'Whiteness' in relation to the colonial project. Said states that the construction of the Orient followed along the same lines as delinquents, the insane, women and the poor. These groups were identified as “problems to be solved or confined...or taken over” (p.207). It is Said's contention that the 'Orient' was constructed as the 'other' in order to obscure indigenous histories, knowledges and possibilities. To extrapolate this to the work of child protection, I would assert that by having workers label families as abnormal it constitutes the worker as 'normal'. This dichotomy provides a clear division, meaning that the worker has nothing in common with the family, and establishes the worker in a position of privilege. To look at families from this privileged position provides a singular view in which the family can be seen, but makes the workers become invisible. In Said's terms, it is to become White, meaning

to become invisible to oneself as a construction of colonization. This privilege ensures that workers focus their attention on ‘fixing’ families rather than examining the disciplinary practices that have shaped them into workers.

Exercising Authority.

As a child protection worker, I was never able to separate from the authority I had over my clients. Even if I had wanted to engage in a helping, mutually supportive relationship with a client there was always the risk that I would have to step in and enforce a rule or policy. There was also the risk that I would have to take more serious action, in that I could remove their child or take them to court if they failed to meet expectations. Though there has been some development in understanding how workers are faced with dual roles, as helper and investigator, in the field of health visiting (Peckover, 2002) there is a shortage of research that has examined how child protection workers negotiate these two roles. More specifically, I could find only one research article that addressed how child protection workers should deal with their authority. As previously discussed, Palmer (1983) makes a distinction between authority and power and presents a positive view of authority. Palmer argues that authority is inherent in every form of social work practice and that social workers must learn to use authority if they are to be effective. Rather than attempting to shed or cover up the authority that is assigned to us as child protection workers, constructive use of authority can strengthen the worker-client relationship (Palmer, 1983).

I can see the appeal to Palmer’s argument that client-worker relationships would be more ‘comfortable’ if the client grants authority to the worker. If the client views the worker in a position of authority there is less likely to be conflict about case decisions.

From my experience, dealing with conflict was one of the most stressful parts of the job. I strongly disliked having to argue with the clients. However, my view is that without these arguments how would clients be able to assert their power? At the same time, if there were no concerns about clients challenging the worker it would allow workers not to think about their privilege of power.

During the interviews with the youth, a number of examples were provided on how child protection workers exercise authority. One youth described how the worker had set up parameters regarding the type and frequency of contact with her mother. Another youth talked about how the worker was getting him into counselling for his drug use, even though he did not view his drug use as problematic. This youth felt that he had no choice but to attend, as he believed that other methods would be used (such as being put into care) if he refused. Through the analyses of the interviews, it occurred to me how social work interventions are privileged as the 'answer' to client problems. If a youth has drug problems, have them go to addiction services, if a youth has experienced abuse, have them go to counselling so they can talk about it. However, what gets missed is how clients view the problem, whether they see themselves as having a problem, whether they want to change, and if the prescribed intervention is something in which they want to participate. This tension between what the client wants and what the worker thinks was particularly evident in one youth's interview. This youth described how her child protection worker repeatedly made requests of her to go to individual counselling despite her statements that she found talking about her problems ineffective. This youth articulated how she found ways to deal with her issues such as through artwork and

journalling. Despite this youth finding coping strategies that she found effective, she continued to be faced with requests to participate in counselling.

Thinking about this scenario from the worker's perspective, I suggest that having clients participate in social work interventions is connected to looking effective as a worker. When it comes to reporting on the case to the supervisor, having clients registered or participating in services (counselling, anger management) is seen as a sign of accomplishment. However, referring clients to other social work interventions is merely moving individuals from one disciplinary apparatus to another (Foucault, 1975, p. 226). I was left wondering if privileging the methods that clients use to cope is a space of resistance for me as a child protection worker? Rather than reproducing the value of certain social work interventions, I could advocate to my supervisor that clients find varied ways to manage the crises in their lives.

In the analysis of the youth interviews, it also became clear that though they were subject to authority, the youth found ways to resist. For example, the youth who had limits placed on her contact with her mother ignored the restrictions and visited her mother when she wanted to. The youth who was asked to go to counselling for addictions agreed to attend, but then added stipulations about where the counselling would take place. The youth who was faced with repeated requests to go to counselling remained firm in her statement that she would not attend. These are just a few examples of how clients exercise their own power in moments of domination. Foucault's writing on resistance suggests that it is "both a precondition for power relations and a manifest response to ongoing relations of power" (Butin, 2001, p.169). My authority as a child protection worker only exists because clients "as the subjects are free" (Foucault, 1997,

292). It is because clients are involved in accepting and rejecting the constraints placed upon them that the need for my role as an authority exists. If all of our clients did what we asked them to do then the need to assume an authoritative/dominating role would be negated.

Instrumental Modes

As mentioned earlier, when examining power relations Foucault (1977) suggests that it is crucial to identify which methods are used to act on the actions of others. In his writings on disciplinary power, Foucault discusses the instruments of hierarchal observation, normalizing judgement and documentation (p.170). Though they were initially used to more efficiently place prisoners under surveillance, Foucault found that the same principles applied to disciplines such as education, medicine and psychiatry. Here, I examine how these instruments are used within the child protection system.

Hierarchical Observation.

As suggested by its name, 'hierarchical' there are levels of supervision, monitoring and surveillance that occur within a child protection agency. First, we have the family who is monitored through the use of home visits, phone calls, and contact with service providers, e.g. doctors, day care providers, and schools. The very idea of being investigated/supervised by a child protection system is a very powerful instrument. It imposes on the family "a principle of compulsory visibility" (Foucault, 1975, p.187), meaning that they are asked to expose themselves, e.g. their practices, their thoughts. Foucault stated that the population's visibility assured the hold of power that is exercised over them. He said, "It is the fact of being constantly seen, of being able always to be seen, that maintains the disciplined individual in his subjection" (p.187). This has a

significant impact as parents report feeling intimidated, threatened and/or controlled at least part of the time during their involvement with a child protection agency (McCallum, 1995).

As identified earlier through the principle of the panopticon, the child protection worker is also under observation and surveillance by the child protection system. Here, I want to outline the instruments used to monitor and control workers' performance. First, workers are faced with agency guidelines such as norms for client contact and compliance with paperwork. Second, workers are expected to consult with their supervisor on a regular basis regarding decision making and case planning. Also, supervision sessions, where a worker reviews some or all of their cases to advise the supervisor of the status of the cases, ensure that the supervisor is aware of what's happening but also finds out the type of contact and quality of contact the worker is having with the family. For example, workers are asked to report if they have not completed the required number of home visits set out by the agency's guideline. Galper (1975) suggested that these types of controls are intended to "foster discipline in workers, encourage the acceptance of hierarchical and authoritarian structures, and create passivity and disengagement from others" (p.56).

Normalizing judgement.

Foucault (1975) stated that normalizing judgement operates through a classification system that polarizes good and bad behaviour. Individual acts are compared to:

"a whole and to one another in a hierarchal, value-laden construction that outlines

an average, and defines the bounds of the external limits. Healthy behaviours become defined in opposition to the forbidden, the shameful and the abnormal...”

(Keenan, 2001, p.213).

Referrals made to the child protection agency are often based on community or family members suggesting that a parent's behaviour is not 'normal'. Determining whether a case will be opened for service or closed is based on the identification of problems that require intervention. Though normalizing judgement plays a significant role in the world of child protection it receives very little attention. Social workers are trained to be non-judgemental, but the hypocrisy of this notion is rarely challenged. How can social workers be non-judgemental when it is required of them to label families as having problems such that intervention into their lives can be justified?

I assert that there are some benefits to the social work profession by not addressing the role of normalizing judgment. One of the outcomes of the normalizing judgement is that it allows for individual behaviour to be measured without the requirement of considering and incorporating contextual and historical circumstances. For example, parental behaviour, such as substance abuse, can be individualized rather than considering how substance abuse has been constituted as a 'deviant' behaviour. By keeping substance abuse as an individual problem it means that a solution to the problem is possible, especially since social work treatments are seen as a means to overcome addictions. Another outcome is that by treating individual families and their behaviour as the problem, the notion of intervening in their lives, as an issue of power, is made invisible. The child protection worker is justified to enter into the family's world because they have been identified as having a 'problem'. The need to 'fix' the problem overrides

the family's right to privacy and self-determination. In summary, by not addressing the role of normalizing judgment in social work, professionals get to keep their positions of authority.

Documentation.

During home visits and other contacts with the family, the worker is expected to write notes. Foucault (1975) stated that the use of documentation serves to constitute the person as "a describable, analyzable object" (p.190). de Montigny (1995a) argues that the practice of writing professional reports is a subtle and less visible exercise of power. He wrote, "power is realized as social workers construct their accounts about clients' lives and thereby appropriate for themselves the right to tell the story and to decide what gets counted as relevant" (p. 219). Little (1998) points out that the subjects of case files rarely have an opportunity to submit their own words into the case file. Instead, the worker's voice is privileged as they recount and interpret their experiences.

Documents are very powerful, especially in child protection cases. Richardson (2003) wrote about her own experience of being investigated by a child protection agency. She argues that once something is written in a file it becomes "almost indistinguishable from fact and it is never removed or changed even in the light of 'further reflection' or new evidence" (p.125). This is quite significant considering that many of these documents are used in court to determine whether a parent will lose their parental rights. I would assert that there is not enough emphasis within the child protection field that documents are never a complete synopsis of events and happenings. Rather as a worker, I recall being pressured to ensure that the documents were complete, especially by the lawyers who would be using this information in their presentation to the

court. In a later section, I discuss the struggles I experienced dealing with the practice of documentation.

Throughout this project I found that the youth were aware of how much power there was in documentation and how vulnerable they were if information was reported incorrectly. All three youth stated seeing their social worker taking notes during home visits. They appeared to recognize the significance of these notes as they all made comments about it. For example, one youth said, “I’d watch him write the notes... I would glance over and look at the notes. I don’t want them to write the wrong thing or mixing it up”. This suggests that youth recognize that workers are susceptible to documenting information in a different manner than what the youth intended. At the same time, the youth also appear to recognize the power of the written document. The youths’ concern that they may be misquoted suggests that they recognize the permanence of the written document. Once something they said was in writing they had no control over how it would be interpreted and used.

As a worker, writing notes was one of the most difficult parts of the job for two reasons. First, I found that trying to write notes during interviews interfered with my ability to be ‘present’. Second, I found that my notes were never complete in describing the interaction and/or events on which I was reporting. I recall that some of my notes would include half-finished sentences, or individual words that were supposed to jog my memory at a later time. However, when it would be time to write up a report my notes were often difficult to decipher or missed information. This is important considering that in the child protection system these notes carry a great deal of significance, especially for those cases that go to court.

While conducting this research project, I was given the opportunity to review some of the previous reports that I had written about children and youth. In looking at the reports I became aware of how much ‘sense making’ I attempted to engage in. In writing a report that was to describe a child’s life for the past 30 days or 90 days, I felt that it had to make sense. If a child was acting out for a period of time, I had to incorporate information or suggestions about why this would occur. For example, “Johnny’s temper tantrums were very difficult to deal with over the month of July, it is speculated by this worker that having no school to attend meant that he had no regular routine to follow and therefore he felt confused”. I would then make suggestions on how we were trying to improve the situation to stop the disruptive or difficult behaviours. de Montigny (1995b) stated that social workers are expected to enter into the good sense and cogency of their work. Through the use of written documents, social workers are engaged in constructing a reality that can be ordered, regulated, and administered. This is just one example of many where I was called upon to try and put coherence to children’s behaviours.

I would suggest that there is an approach to writing these reports whereby engaging in sense making is not the primary goal. Rather the emphasis is on reporting the worker’s experiences and presenting multiple interpretations rather than one single view of the situation. At the same time, incorporating multiple voices in the document to present various viewpoints, such as the youths, the foster parents, the biological parents, and service providers. This might mean sharing the report writing. Predominately, reports are written by the social worker, however, Richardson (2003) reports that parents and professionals may have very different perceptions of events and happenings.

Richardson advocates that these varying perspectives should be added to reports even if it means that professionals have to relinquish some degree of power and control over the documents.

Through the youth interviews, I also became aware of how the reports that we write are not shared with them. All three youth reported that they had never seen any written reports from their worker. Where is the youth's voice in the reports? What if he or she disagrees with what is written? How do we incorporate their views into these reports? These are important questions that have to be addressed if we want to engage in social work that works *with* youth rather than *on* youth.

The Degrees of Rationalization

Foucault suggested that because the field of possibilities of how individuals act is extensive, the exercise of power is connected to the effectiveness of its instruments. When instruments do not work, or do not achieve the desired outcome, changes are made in order to increase the likelihood of their results. Within the child protection system we can see how instruments have changed in order to try and improve the outcomes. Outcomes being defined as protecting all children from harm. Predominately, these changes are precipitated due to an inquest into a child's death, which is viewed as the ultimate failure of the system. For example, the Gove (1995) inquiry into child protection in British Columbia has brought about a number of changes in practice such as mandatory 20-week training for new staff before they begin carrying cases.

At the same time, child protection has changed over the years due to greater pressure to investigate, assess and manage risk (Smith, 2003). One of the most significant tools that have been introduced is the Risk Assessment Model. This model

was promoted as a means to provide a systematic method of assessing risk such that consistency among workers would occur. However, it has been argued that there may be another agenda behind the use of the Risk Assessment beyond trying to protect children. Goddard et al. (1999) argued that,

“under the guise of protecting children, risk assessment instruments may essentially be devices designed to be used by bureaucratic, managerialist organizations in attempts to protect themselves from blame when tragedies occur. With risk assessment procedures in place, organizations are better placed to shift responsibility to individual workers when mistakes are made” (p.258).

This is quite duplicitous, considering that the forms, in the first place, remove much of the worker’s ability to consider various decision options, define the boundaries of their work, and minimize their discretion (Jones & May, 1992).

The Risk Assessment Model (RAM) incorporates many of the disciplinary functions that I have described above. First, risk factors used in the RAM forms are based on research information on various behaviours that have been identified as predictive of abuse or re-abuse despite the fact that much of this research is plagued with “doubtful validity”(Goddard et al. 1999, p.255). Second, though the RAM is intended to evaluate the family, it inherently individualizes clients because each adult is rated separately. At the same time, problems are individualized, such as a person’s limited financial resources, rather than addressing social issues such as poverty. Thirdly, the RAM enables workers to be easily monitored by the supervisor as they have access to tracking forms that notify them when reports are being completed on time or not. Lastly, the RAM is a professional document that engages the worker in compiling evidence that

either supports the designation of a level of risk or not. The RAM is set up according to a rating scale, 1 being no risk and 5 being high risk. If a family is rated as a 1 the file is closed, however if a family is rated as a 5 then the worker is expected to take evasive action, e.g. remove the child from the home. The RAM is set up to draw more attention to the risks than the strengths of the family, and thus allows for the possibility for more intrusive measures to be taken with families. For example, at the end of the RAM all of the categories that are rated as a three or higher are brought together. However, none of the strengths are brought forward. This could lead to unnecessary actions toward the family. Here's a case example, a father is identified as using cocaine on a regular basis and having a mental health issue. There are concerns because there is a five-year old child in the home. If the worker were to base her decision on the risk factors alone then the strengths or protective factors would be missed. Such as in this case, where the child's grandmother also lives in the home and never allows the child to be alone in the presence of her father and intervenes if the father is not in good mental health.

The limitations of the RAM have been identified by a number of researchers. Therefore, it is not surprising that more changes to how child protection work is done are planned. The Ontario Association of Children's Aid Societies (OACAS) recently presented a position paper (March 8, 2005) outlining their recommendations for amendments to the Child and Family Services Act (CFSA). The OACAS wants a more 'flexible' system of child welfare, which would reach beyond the limits of risk-based practice. One of these amendments is to move to a model called "Differential Service Response". In short, the Differential Response model advocates for a broadened screening system, which would incorporate both protection and assessment processes.

Cases that were determined to be low-risk would no longer be subject to a full protection investigation but rather be diverted to other agencies where services would be available. Though this model suggests that low-risk families would move through the child protection system more swiftly, critics of the model argue that intervention would be more extensive. Specifically, Pelton (2000) argues that the broadening screening system the differential service model promotes would mean that more families would be identified and the involvement from services would be more extensive. At the same time, Pelton argues that by referring clients to community agencies, these agencies would be enlisted as coercive social control agents. The community agencies would be responsible to report back to the child protection system about the family's participation, in case further intervention from the child protection agency was required. So, though families would be dealing with a community agency, the child protection system still has some control over the family. Pelton, concerned with the direction that child protection is heading, argues that,

“it is time to reexamine the deeper issues that CPS (child protection services) terminology and statistics tend to obscure. The level of explicit discussion must shift to that of underlying values, political philosophy, attitudes towards the poor, the political meaning of authority, the nature of social justice, and what we mean by social services and social work. If it does not, the future of child protection is dim, indeed”.

Conclusion

This thesis has taken some initial steps in examining the child protection system from a position that is rarely discussed. Specifically, I have explored how Foucault's

concept of disciplinary power can be used to understand how power operates within the client/worker relationship that occurs within the child protection system. This relationship is shown to be quite complex with power flowing bidirectionally rather than top-down. Instead of viewing power imbalances as a function of state control, I have come to see how the client/worker relationship is constituted by the worker, the client and the social body. How clients and workers are defined comes from the process of subjectification that we all engage in accepting or resisting. By calling myself a child protection worker I clearly distinguish myself as different from a client. At the same time, by making the client the other and portraying their lives as problematic I make myself invisible. The cost to this invisibility is that it obscures the privilege of power that has been assigned to professions, such as child protection work.

While the fields of medicine, psychiatry and health visiting have used Foucault to examine how the profession develops 'regimes of truth' that privilege their knowledge, the child protection system has been slow to examine how the practices they use (e.g. home visits, risk assessment) serve to constitute clients as 'abnormal' or a 'problem' and the child protection worker as the 'expert'. With the shift towards postmodernism in social work (Hartman, 1991), I would assert that the child protection system is being provided a theoretical tool to challenge the accepted 'truths' about how best to serve children and families. It is possible that by viewing clients' worlds as consisting of a web of meanings, created and sustained by both the client and the worker different approaches to make intervention beneficial to all involved might become available.

A benefit of using Foucault is that the child protection system is viewed within the context of the social body. We can see how child protection has become a privileged

field, such that it has been given the authority and mandate to monitor, subject to intervention, label, and treat children and families. As a former worker in this system, it is important for me to place my frustrations with the system into this larger framework. Rather than personalizing my frustrations such as “I never have enough time” or “I’m not cut out for this type of work”, I can see that the instruments and practices that I was required to use reproduce power. Said differently, it was not that I lacked certain qualities in order to do the job effectively and in a manner that respected my clients, but that as a child protection worker I was operating in an environment where certain techniques (e.g. supervision, documentation) were exercised that ensured that I maintained power over my clients.

It is important to acknowledge how complex the power relationship is between workers and clients, and between the worker and the agency. Though there is a view that the worker has all the power, this thesis has shown that the power relationship is fluid and unstable. Both workers and clients are subject to disciplinary practices that define the boundaries of the relationship. For example, I have discussed how ingrained notions of limiting self-disclosure by the worker serve to keep up barriers between the worker and the client. However, within the power relationships between workers and clients and the worker and the system there are also acts of resistance. Foucault points out that by the very act of dominating another it creates a space for resistance. This thesis showed that in the child protection system there are spaces of resistance that exist, and are often used, by both workers and youth. At the same time, I also introduced some possible ways that workers can resist some of the disciplinary practices within the child welfare system. For example, I discussed the possibility of incorporating clients’ voices into the

documentation. Further research is needed to identify the impact of these types of resistance strategies on the worker, on the client and on the system.

I am left wondering if it is possible to operate from a power-sharing model within the child protection system. Given the number and breadth of disciplinary practices that are involved, and the importance of maintaining these practices in order to sustain the social work profession, it is questionable whether a shift in practice is possible. Though I have suggested ways to adjust current practices, Margolin (1997) argues that 'tinkering' may only further mask the hidden agendas of control that are now part of social work practice. Unless the fabric of the profession changes its training, theory, and practical application of theory the fundamental issues of power and control will continue.

Given that the child protection field is constantly shifting and changing in order to improve its ability to safeguard children, a greater emphasis is required on examining how workers operate within this complex, overwhelming and multi-dimensional world. For instance, there are several reasons to be concerned about the number and type of documents child protection workers are expected to complete. Administrative paperwork and case recording consume fifty per cent or more of workers' time (Esposito & Fine, 1985). Keenan (2000) identifies that there is great risk to having the worker be overwhelmed with paperwork. Keenan suggests that in these circumstances workers are more likely to implement disciplinary practices and be less open to examining the social dynamics of their relationships. Further research could provide more insight into the factors that facilitate workers to engage in reflexively examining their position of power.

Reflections on Process

This project is focused on the issues of power relationships. Therefore, to have reported on other peoples' experiences without reflecting on myself would have contravened what I was attempting to accomplish. My intent was not to create knowledge – e.g. about how the child protection system works - but rather to promote dialogue. Through describing some of my conversations with the youth participants and the conversations I had with myself through my journal entries, I demonstrated my struggle to make sense of my experience as a child protection worker. Using a postmodern autoethnography allowed me to get 'personal' with the subject matter. Actually, what I experienced was that it demanded that I be close to the subject matter. Looking back I can see how important that was. If I am advocating that workers be open to examining the social dynamics of their relationships with clients, how could this have any significance if I had not engaged in the process myself?

The limitation to using autoethnography is that it cannot be generalized to all workers in child protection. Some workers may view their power differently, in that they have no problem using their power because they see it as acting in the best interests of the children. Though my experience may not be the same as other child protection workers the one thing we have in common is our position of power over clients. How we see and use our power is important if we want to work with clients and not on them.

There are some researchers and scholars who may view this thesis as self-indulgent. The field of autoethnography has been criticized for being too narcissistic (Coffey, 1999). There were times during this process that I was concerned about how my voice was privileged over the voices of the youth who participated in the research study. At times, I felt that it was more important to write about the youths' experiences rather

than my own. However, I believe that the voice of workers have been marginalized, which is supported by how little research I could find on this subject, and saw this as an opportunity to present my experience as a worker. At the same time, I believe I am a better worker for having completed this process. I am now aware of the many instruments and practices that I was subject too and also reproduced with clients. I am also aware of how I resisted these practices and have identified some other approaches that I can use to work in a more power-balanced relationship with my clients. Though a shift in social work practice may be a long way off, there are some strategies that I can now use to be more inclusive of clients' power.

What have I learned?

Throughout this research process there have been some very trying times for me. Undertaking this thesis has brought up very personal issues about power. There were many occasions when I ended up in tears, protesting that this was too hard and I wanted to run away. I felt trapped, helpless, overwhelmed and exhausted. I was actually quite surprised by how those feelings were very similar to the frustrations I experienced as a child protection worker. In discussions with my thesis advisor he said that it was not surprising that by studying the topic of power it brought up my own issues of power.

What Foucault's writing on power has shown me is that my feelings of powerlessness are not fact. I am never without power. Though my subjectivity may be inscribed by my relationship with certain institutions (family, work), it is never complete. There is always room to move, to resist and to create change. This is an important concept that I can incorporate into my work with youth and their families. Just as I am never without power, neither are the youth and their families.

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